

**“Saptapadi” --The Seven Steps:  
A Study of the Urban Hindu Arranged  
Marriage in Selected Indian-English Fiction by  
Women Authors**

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Reshmi Roy

## ABSTRACT

This study explores the influence of the Indian socio-cultural hegemonic discourse on the urban Hindu arranged marriage. For this purpose, four novels in English by Indian women writers have been selected for their location within the specific urban Indian socio-cultural tradition. These novels are the avenues through which the Gramscian theories of hegemony and consensual control are observed. The study focuses on unravelling the damage caused by the hegemonic socio-cultural traditions within the marriages portrayed in the fiction. The interplay between the reader and the texts is vital in further exploring the reach of hegemony into the reading codes of the audience. The need for a model reader is discussed within the study which also addresses the roles of both protagonists and readers as 'cultural insiders/outsideers.' The study focuses on the emotional and socio-cultural dilemmas faced by the protagonists and the audience who occupy the 'in-between-zones' of those who fall into neither category of absolute insiders or outsiders in cultural terms. This thesis is not an attempt aggressively to deconstruct the Indian traditional social structure. The main aim of this thesis is to use the literary discourse as an instrument to explore the subversion of the ancient Hindu discourses whenever it has suited the vested interests shaping the hegemonic socio-cultural discourses. This study also attempts to further an understanding of the exploitative manipulation of married couples by various interest groups. In the process, using fiction as an instrument, there might be a chance to create stronger marriages and more harmonious marital interactions within urban Indian society.

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## Introduction

I have undertaken this study with the aim of answering specific questions which have formulated themselves in my mind over the years. These questions have arisen from my perspective as a student of literature and women's studies as well as my own cultural and gender positioning. These questions have obtained further clarity as I have explored the fiction of selected Indian women authors using English as their medium. The language of expression assumes paramount importance when it comes to exploring a vital issue such as 'arranged marriage' within the lifestyles of a particular cross-section of Indian society. All the women authors whose works are discussed in this thesis are from the middle/upper-middle class of the huge Indian population. A couple of them are also part of the new and fastest growing group; the expatriate Indian writer, a group following in the tradition of literary exponents such as Raja Rao, A.K. Ramanujan, Bharati Mukherjee and others. They have not only used English as a medium of communication and expression for a large part of their lives: they have created new forms of expression, almost an entire new, yet rich language, allowing the inflections of their different mother tongues to enrich the traditional English usage.

My situation with regard to this thesis is very much that of a participant-observer. Being an urban, educated, Bengali Brahmin woman in her mid-thirties, an expatriate Indian, married to a man of the same caste, from a similar cultural background of rigidly white-collared professionals, and a mother of two sons, my position as a researcher is highly strategic; possibly even controversial. Most important of all, I am an urban Indian woman who is living happily within an arranged marriage.

The novels are set within specific and strongly defined cultural locales. In order to penetrate the cultural landscape of the novels, the reader requires some awareness of the intricate socio-cultural ramifications within the books. The 'cultural insider' would find it easier than a 'cultural outsider' to grasp the finer cultural nuances. The ethnographer and anthropologist, James Clifford studies "the new powerful scientific and literary genre that is ethnography, based on participant observation" (32-3). Participant observation is a term

for continual shuttling between outside and inside a culture. Clifford goes on to say: “Understood literally, participant observation is a paradoxical, misleading formula, but may be taken seriously if reformulated in hermeneutic terms as a dialectic of experience and interpretation”(ibid). Such comments provide deeper insights into the concept of a model reader for the selected fiction.

My perspective involving critical “interpretation” is definitely personal and subjective; that of a cultural “insider,” but objective research and thought has been applied in the construction of the thesis. No conceptual thesis is ever created in a cultural vacuum. The research a person is involved in is very much a part of the individual she or he is. In my personal situation vis-à-vis this thesis, I am both a cultural insider as well as a cultural outsider. Both perspectives give me a greater understanding of the issue of arranged marriages within Hindu middle and upper middle-class society. Given my educational and socio-cultural background, in certain aspects, I am also a model reader. As the thesis progresses, these matters will be studied in detail.

With respect to my own cultural standing I also walk the zone ‘in-between’. I observe how new hegemonies are again yet created by those who were ‘in-between’ characters. Yesterday’s dissenter is today’s traditionalist. I am an Indian woman located with a very specific caste and class identity but I am also a migrant within a foreign culture which accords me anonymity, yet paradoxically places me within a specific role in that culture and finally allows me to view my own culture objectively, yet from an altered perspective. I moved to a new country in my late twenties and was perhaps, for the first time, fiercely and proudly possessive of my own background; yet like some of the protagonists, the ‘West’ to me symbolised freedom of an intellectual and emotional kind which was perhaps not really possible in my own country and amongst my own people. These are purely subjective thoughts and cannot always be totally rationalised. Moving away from the occasionally claustrophobic hold of the socio-cultural discourse I was reared within, I was able to see in it a kind of beauty, an immense richness in its intricate patterns like a tapestry whose real beauty is never very visible unless observed at a distance. This distant beauty had once been vaguely understood by me when as I child I

had lived outside my land and its culture. Today I call another land my own and this thesis is a product both of the great magic India wields over me and the intense happiness life in New Zealand gives me.

I have chosen these particular writers and the selected texts with a specific purpose. They are different regionally and in their writing styles, but there are striking similarities. The books are about a particular class of people. By caste they are Brahmins, in class terms, they are homogeneous. The protagonists are upper-middle class, they are educated and all appear to be in some way or the other influenced by the hegemonic discourse in such a manner that they are unable to emerge as persons in their own right. Deshpande's book is different and the way it is so is dealt with at length in the thesis. Though the analysis may be criticised as a homogenisation of the urban middle classes ignoring regional and other differences; my argument is that these texts are specifically chosen to illustrate the point that in post-independence India, and especially today's India, a particular class of people function within an almost identical socio-cultural ideological framework which eschews other factors such as regionality. These novels portray such sets of people, and as discussed within the thesis the authors themselves share many commonalities such as being Brahmins by caste. They also have similar upper-middle class backgrounds and all are well-educated women. Divakaruni and Badami are expatriate writers and their female protagonists speak of experiences abroad as does Hariharan's female protagonist Devi. Conflict with the mother, who acts as a representative of female patriarchy bolstering the dominant discourses, is also evident in the novels. Three of the novels bear striking resemblances to each other and I have introduced Deshpande's narrative as yet another kind of vision about Indian life and culture. Deshpande as a writer is of a somewhat earlier generation than the other three and perhaps the one with the strongest roots within the Indian cultural discourse. It is her work that acts as a counterfoil in some ways to the other texts by expressing vividly the warmth to be found within a marriage and the joy in unearthing and enjoying one's own dormant talents. Her book expresses the power of the individual self and its ultimate ability to move beyond the often banal discourses of hegemonic patriarchy.

This thesis attempts to answer particular questions regarding the Hindu arranged marriage situation using the study of fiction as an instrument to reveal the different faces to such marriages and provide explanations of the connected issues from various perspectives of these different yet popular authors. It is to be noted that it is not a sociological study (although it uses certain sociological ideas at times) and in no way attempts to deal with issues such as dowry demands and women's emancipation within the Indian cultural milieu. When such issues are considered relevant to illustrate a point within the main issue of the thesis they are included to the extent required to clarify the point in hand. In the course of study, I have found that some of the most vital questions emerging from the literary and cultural research include :-

1. Which factors support the enormous control exercised by the extended Indian family over the lives of young married couples?
2. Why is the young couple dissuaded from becoming a separate and closely bonded nuclear unit, with all rights to privacy and a life of their own without constant familial interference in all matters?
3. Why are the married couples discouraged from forming intense emotional attachments toward each other and expressing their feelings in an overt manner?
4. Why do female members of the family participate to the maximum extent in the post-marital harassment of the bride and groom, especially in arranged marriage situations?
5. To what extent is a marital relationship distorted by such constant familial interference? Who are the major sufferers from such influences and what are the long-term effects of such disruption and disharmony?
6. How socially influential is commercial Hindi cinema with its incessant exposition of repressive traditional cultural codes of behaviour and conduct within marital and family relationships?
7. What steps can be considered for providing an opportunity to form good marital relationships within arranged marriages and foster a healthy social discourse?

All the questions relate to arranged marriages within Hindu society and the fictional discourse provides an opportunity to study the issue and attempt to find solutions. The novels portray certain instances whereby the questions listed above can clearly describe the complications being created and the resultant problems that will occur. This study embraces a wide theoretical framework in its endeavour to reach the crux of the issue: whose interests are really being served, and can the problems of the situation really be resolved, keeping intact the positive features of the social practice of the Hindu arranged marriage?

There is clearly a need to find answers to the questions above. The authors and their writing originates within and from a particular socio-cultural discourse. The texts come out of that discourse and in many ways reflect the complications within that society. On a personal level, I have always believed that the institution of matrimony lends great strength and support to the social and moral fabric of a nation. An unhappy couple portends a bad marriage and ultimately a strained household and distressed children. The right to a happy and peaceful childhood is a basic human right which is largely ignored. In a country where the needs of adults, specially those of the elderly, are put before those of children, such a right is considered a mere frivolity. I believe that every couple has the right to try to achieve a healthy marriage. The ancient system of the Hindu arranged marriage has proved its strength by surviving centuries of political, cultural, historical and social change. But it faces its biggest challenge in contemporary Indian society. Whether it can adapt and survive and perhaps even find enrichment in a rapidly changing world remains to be seen. But as an institution it offers challenges, sometimes unfair ones, especially from a female perspective. In such a situation the convention-bound hegemonic discourses can often stifle the efforts of couples working hard at building a strong relationship.

It is my understanding from my status as an educated upper middle-class Indian woman and a 'cultural insider' as well as a participant and observer within my own culture that the main reason the traditional discourses are touted by families is to maintain the family hegemony and control over the younger generations. It is a matter of interests being

served and not ultimately ideological battles being consciously waged. As a consequence, the young married couple often fail to look forward in the same direction and understand that they are meant to have common goals. A fulfilling and loving relationship between a married couple is always an inspiring and joyous thing to witness. Any obstacle in the course of such a path should be tackled and resolutions to problems sought by logically analysing the socio-cultural discourses. My chosen authors are aware of the atmosphere of intrigue surrounding these cultural situations, and the quiet domestic tragedies that keep occurring as a result. The characters of the writers' imaginations move through the narratives enacting many of these complex and at times almost tragic situations. A fact that cannot be ignored is that human beings are on the whole self-serving creatures, and unless someone's interests are being served, so much effort would not go into maintaining the hegemonic structure. Everything is formulated and deconstructed by people, not machines. This study touches upon the manipulation of the human mind as an issue.

Different chapters offer various perspectives on the textual analysis. After analysing the fictional texts, the answers to the above questions render it necessary to explore many ideological discourses. Theories of cultural studies have proved the most useful to use as instruments in the search for answers. They encompass so many fields that one does not feel hedged in by the parochiality of their theoretical scope. This thesis looks at fictional narratives and tries to identify the causes for the stresses within the arranged marriage in those texts. In the process of doing so, I noticed that it is mostly a play of different interest groups that disrupts the marital life of the protagonists. The discourses fostered by these power groups, the cultural messages conveyed and understood are best approached through the use of critics Antonio Gramsci and Stuart Hall. The Gramscian theory of hegemony provides support to the core arguments of the thesis. The theories of secondary critics on Gramsci, given their academic standing and the quality of work produced, has been used to validate my arguments. Within the field of cultural studies, the Gramscian concept of hegemony and consensual control has been the most relevant in analysing the discourses within this study. That is the reason for its extensive use, although no claim is made for a comprehensive engagement with Gramscian theory.

The thesis also focuses on the relationship between the reader and the text. Theories of literary critics such as Stanley Fish (1980), Wolfgang Iser (1978) and Janice Radway (1974, 1984, 1999) have been used to substantiate the arguments. Vital concepts within the thesis apart from 'hegemony' and 'consensual control', are the concepts of the 'cultural insider/outsider' and Trinh T. Minh-ha's (1991) concept of 'in-between-zone' characters. They are used as important analytical tools. Radway's identification of the reader supported by Ien Ang's theories of audience interpretations and responses lends greater critical insights into the texts.

Other concepts which have been constantly used in the analytical process are the idea of an interpretive community of readers and the role of the participant observer, who may be considered the target audience and a model reader. Stuart Hall's (1999) model regarding encoding and decoding of received messages works as an important analytical tool within this study. Several Gramscian concepts such as the notion of 'traditional' and 'organic intellectuals' further provide great insights into the deeper meanings within the texts and help formulate certain solutions to problems explored by the researcher.

In brief then, to answer the questions raised by a study of the narrative discourses it is necessary to return here to the roots of the arranged marriage system. These roots lie within ancient Hindu socio-cultural traditions and therefore a socio-historical background is provided at the beginning of the study. It provides the foundations within which the discourses explored within the study are rooted. Commercial Hindi cinema influences most current socio-cultural discourses, including that of marriage. In modern times, cinema has infiltrated most homes through television and the cable network. To ignore it is to ignore one of the most vital influences of the cultural discourse.

Caste as a factor influencing the narrative discourses has been studied along with education, given the socio-cultural location of the novels in urban India. The texts refer to Hindu marriages and all Hindus are born into and die within a particular caste. Though the settings are generally contemporary, the various protagonists move through different

decades of post-independence India. The chapters have been strategically designed and placed to logically develop the ideas emerging from the study.

Chapter One creates the foundation which supports the entire structure of the thesis. An awareness of the socio-cultural, religious and historical discourses influencing the functioning of Indian society and all relationships and social interactions helps provide deeper insights into the fictional discourse. Without an understanding of the importance of marriage as a ritual amongst Hindus, the roots and origins of the ideals incorporated within the Hindu marriage and its strategic role in the entire functioning of the Indian social system, the fictional analysis cannot proceed. Simultaneously, the importance of the extended family system in India has to be understood in relation to arranged marriages as it is not very easy to study one completely dissociated from the other.

In order to build a secure socio-cultural framework within which to analyse the fictional discourses and locate the central argument, this chapter looks at issues relating to the excessively controlling presence of family and elders within Indian arranged marriages. The cultural sanctions used as means of control through convenient interpretation of social and religious traditions by vested interest groups are present within the analysis. Socio-cultural problems are explored by novelists often using fiction as an apparatus of investigation and possible change.

Chapter Two considers the impact of cinema and generated ideas of romance on middle and upper-middle class urban Indian youth and society as seen within the novels. The implications of culturally generated ideas on love and romance are clearly felt within the novels. The vital role played by fantasy within Indian arranged marriages is also explored in this chapter. The world of cinema is interwoven into the fictional texts to bring out varied aspects of the urban Indian marital situation. There is a continual element of fantasy operating within the minds of the younger protagonists that a husband in an arranged marriage will miraculously seem to occupy roles of lover, protector and the perfect friend and companion from the outset.



Chapter Three's main focus is on the cultural world of the novels and the impact the cultural location has on the marriages analysed within the selected texts. In this process of cultural analysis, the concepts of the 'cultural insider/cultural outsider' as well as 'participant-observer' are explored through the characters. The analysis mainly uses the theories of James Clifford. The concept of the model reader is discussed as well as the issue of a specific model reader/s being essential to the textual analysis.

Chapter Four explores the concept of caste in Hindu society as a factor influencing individual lives within the fictional context. It also attempts to analyse caste as a feature of Hindu urban society from traditional and contemporary perspectives. The chapter further analyses the narratives by applying concepts of the cultural insider/outsider (as used in Chapter Three), linking these ideas to the influence of caste in socio-cultural situations.

The importance of caste in the everyday life of urban middle-class Indians is a debatable issue. With regard to the urban Indian middle classes, Andre Beteille, a leading sociologist based in India refers to them as "... urban Indians in what may be described as modern occupations . . . ." (1996 151).<sup>1</sup> Beteille further analyses the attitude of this social group to caste:

Of course, educated Indians know that caste exists, but they are unclear and troubled about what it means for them as members of a society that is part of the modern world. No one can say that it is easy to give a clear and consistent account of the meaning and significance of caste in India today. (ibid 153)

This section looks at the authorial perspectives on the hegemonic aspects of caste in both positive and negative terms. The vital issue with regard to the fiction is the role played by caste in determining the marriages. Another issue within the novels is whether any characters overstep caste boundaries and if they do, with what consequences.

Chapter Five analyses education as a factor affecting the Hindu marriages within the novels. It is important to understand whether education functions as a powerful

instrument of change within the narratives, or is yet again a hegemonic tool. This study also explores the effects of education in terms of allocating specific positions to the protagonists. The ability of education to function as a source of power and a means to personal and marital happiness is also discussed.

The term 'education' here refers to the acquiring of formal schooling and tertiary education. Certain issues linked with formal education in India have to be touched upon to clarify the socio-cultural discourse operative within the fiction. A brief history of education in India is outlined, stressing the importance attached to formal education by contemporary urban Indian upper- middle and middle classes.

Chapter Six looks at the changes within marital relationships in urban Indian society keeping the fictional narratives in the foreground. The core idea of the thesis of constant dominance and repression of the younger married couples and offspring through the hegemonic discourse propagated by the older generation is an important feature of this chapter. Simultaneously, it also explores the subversive interpretation of the dominant order, especially by the women protagonists, who often break tradition without exhibiting outright defiance. Further discussion on the readership and the audience's varied readings of the novels is also part of the chapter.

Using different analytical tools, I have embarked on this exploratory journey which aims to provide certain insights into the issues surrounding the cultural discourses within the text and urban Indian society at large. Each chapter provides a perspective which finally contributes to a more complete picture combining various discourses and the start of a solution.

## Chapter One: The Socio-Historical Background

*The ceremony is going to continue for a long time – the putting of sindur on the woman's forehead, the recital of more mantras, the official giving away of the bride, the recital of even more mantras. But as far as I'm concerned it's done, because I feel joined to Sunil, for ever and ever.*

*Sister of My Heart (158)*

In India, marriage or *vivaha* as it is termed in Sanskrit, is the single most important ritual and event in the lives of individuals. It continues to contain almost all the ancient features from its time of origin. The history of Hindu marriage can be traced back a few millennia. H. N. Chatterjee, the Sanskrit scholar, states:

Marriage to the Hindus is a religious institution to which the famous definition of marriage in Roman Law is fully applicable. It is indeed, as in ancient Rome, an association for life and productive of full partnership, both in human and divine rights and duties.<sup>2</sup> To them marriage involves sacred and onerous duties. In order to acquire competence for discharge of religious duties associated with it, there is a necessity for preparatory discipline. (4)

The Vedas set out in detail the ritualistic importance of the nuptial ceremony and the significance of each ritual attached to it.<sup>3</sup> The rites of the Hindu marriage ceremony are very complex and have not undergone much simplification over the years. In contemporary India, further dimensions have been added to an already intensely complicated system because of the advent of technology and economic growth. According to Pandit Bhaiyaram Sarma:

Ceremonial rites and rituals occupy a place of utmost importance in the life of a devout Hindu. Others, who pride themselves on their Western culture and newfangled, avant-garde ideas, often scoff at the *samskaras*, but even they and the members of their family are as afraid of flouting them as any average religious Hindu. Society, however urbanized and unorthodox, has not been able to ring out the old when every little work in the Hindu home, sacred or profane, begins with

the performance of appropriate rites according to the prescribed code.

(Introduction vii)

Ancient scriptures outline various forms of marriage. Some are not totally acceptable; others are very much in evidence even with the passage of a few thousand years.<sup>4</sup> The Hindu marriage ceremony traditionally has certain very important and set features and rituals. H.N. Chatterjee is of the opinion that the extreme complexity of the rituals of Hindu marriage have evolved because of the contribution of “the great masses of people and races with divergent levels of culture . . .”(3).

Linked closely to the Hindu ideal of marriage is also the concept of the extended family. The extended family as a whole body exercises enormous control over most aspects of the lives of a young married couple. Patricia Uberoi explains that a joint or extended Hindu family, in legal terms, is an Indian socio-cultural concept deriving from “Hindu legal texts and is concerned with defining coparcenary property relations and regulating matters of ritual, marriage and inheritance”(Uberoi 387).<sup>5</sup> In sociological terms, it implies “a household composed of two or more married couples”(ibid). It would also naturally mean the offspring of the couples and mostly the spouses of the male offspring. India is one of a handful of nations where marriages are still arranged. Indian society distinguishes sharply between ‘arranged’ versus ‘love’ marriages. In contemporary urban India, the ‘arranged marriage’, whereby the spouse is selected by an individual’s family and elders within the same caste, community, religious, cultural and financial background, is still widely practised in all parts of the country amongst most religious communities.

As the chapter progresses, further insights are provided on the issue of parental control and the often exploitative and manipulative nature of the parent-child interaction is revealed, exposing the fact that traditional ritualism is ultimately a means to an end, that of furthering parental control over the lives of adult and

married offspring. Tradition wraps the marriage ritual in excessive pomp and ceremony, obfuscating the deeper meaning of the marriage vows in an ancient language, thereby leaving the bride and groom unaware of the mutual bonding the scriptures exhort them to achieve.

One specific control system in the Hindu marriage ritual is the performing of the entire ceremony in Sanskrit. The mantras are chanted by priests, who are Brahmins by caste and none of the individuals involved in the marriage understand them. The Hindu mantras involve vows, promises and commitments on both side and most of the participants rarely understand anything of what they are actually committing with the holy fire as witness. The *Saptapadi* are the seven steps taken around the fire by the bride and groom together, their garments joined symbolising their unbreakable knot. The bridegroom, parrot-like, intones the mantra after the priest. Very rarely does he understand the depth of the commitment he is undertaking. The mantra, as translated, goes thus:

*By taking seven steps with me do thou become my friend,*

*By taking seven steps together we become friends.*

*I shall become thy friend,*

*I shall never give up thy friendship:*

*Let us live together and take counsel of one another.* (Padfield 109)

The hegemony of the dominant discourse is seen in the complaisant manner in which most educated urbanite Hindus undergo the ceremony. There are vested interests operating continually in this cultural scenario. The older generation, particularly the parents of the individual spouses can be viewed as perpetrators and staunch upholders of this discourse. What seems to be motivating them is an urgent desire to control the lives of their offspring in order to ensure their superior position within the cultural tradition, relegating their offspring to a subordinate status. The word 'friend' is the most remarkable within the *Saptapadi* mantra as the majority of Indian parents never mention that term in relation to husband-wife interactions. The bond of friendship is not allowed to easily flourish between man and wife as it can be a source of strength for the

couple in their endeavours to withstand the pressures of patriarchal hegemony and build a more independent marriage.

An interesting aspect of Hindu marital discourse is the lack of interest the Hindu male is habitually supposed to display in his newly wedded wife. The concept of the wife as *ardhangini* is completely nullified by this discourse. In ancient Hindu tradition a man's life was not considered complete without a wife, his *ardhangini* or other half. H.N Chatterjee writes:

The high conception of marriage in India may be traced back to the age of the Vedas. The Rigvedic verses often speak of the harmony of the husband and the wife. The idea of cooperation has been carried further in the *Brahmana*<sup>6</sup> texts. Thus the *Satapathabrahmana* emphatically declares that a wife is half of one's person and therefore before getting a wife, a man cannot be said to be complete. (13)

The traditions expressed above are contradictory to practice in average urban Indian lives. Atrey and Kirpal claim:

The woman is often regarded as a sex-object and a means of procreation. She is known and recognized only through her relationship with man and is not expected to have an independent identity. Even in modern times, when women have achieved economic independence and high educational standards, they are still regarded as inferior to men. (104)

The subversion of these traditions has occurred in order to facilitate the establishment of a patriarchal hegemony by the ruling classes. In the novels, the factor of consensual control is operating through the older Hindu women, who have become main advocates of the dominant discourse. The concept of the *ardhangini* has disappeared in all but name only. As explained above, the Hindu wife, even in contemporary times, is in a very subordinate position. Sir William Monier's translation of a passage from the Hindu epic poem *Mahabharat* goes thus:

*A wife is half the man, his truest friend;*

*A loving wife is a perpetual spring  
 Of virtue, pleasure, wealth; a faithful wife  
 Is his best aid in seeking heavenly bliss;  
 A sweetly-speaking wife is a companion  
 In solitude, a father in advice,  
 A rest in passing through life's wilderness.*<sup>7</sup> (Padfield 48)

Within the narratives, a complete subversion of these traditional ideals is observed. Most of the couples are in relationships which are sterile at best and hostile at worst, excepting Sumi and Gopal (*A Matter of Time*). The husband-wife relationship of couples such as Kalyani and Shripati (*A Matter of Time*), Devi and Mahesh (*The Thousand Faces of Night*), Saroja and Dadda (*Tamarind Mem*) as well as most of the others, contains no element of friendship, romance or laughter. In fact, Sunil and Anju's (*Sister of My Heart*) relationship starts out well but ultimately ends in bitterness. The authors use their fiction to comment strongly on the destruction of traditions governing marriage as an institution through the machinations of the hegemonic discourse.

The dominant culture appears to subvert the message of the established scriptures, in its attempt to prevent the spouses from forming a close bond after marriage. The question arises that if a married couple is considered through religious doctrine to be two halves of a whole, why is the male partner supposed to display a lack of interest in the very person supposedly comprising a part of him and, by virtue of the marriage rites bound to him for life? The hegemonic discourse, in order to foster vested interests of elders and extended family uses constructed cultural systems as an instrument of consensual control. In the context of maintaining the discourse, Gramscian theories on historical laws as explained by Morera are also relevant in analysing the narratives:

Historical laws are manifested through what Gramsci calls the 'homogeneous part' of individual wills. This homogeneous part is the automatism of the ensemble of social relations which, Gramsci seems to suggest, acts as a rule of behaviour, so that whatever the individual actors may do, the limit of their choices is governed by the rule. The automatism

is proposed by the structure of a society, and hence it is independent of the will of individuals . . . It must be noted that this manifestation or appearance of the structures and their tendential laws as rules of behaviour, established norms, etc., constitutes the basis for Gramsci's theory of the identity of politics and economics, and it highlights the importance of hegemonic institutions. (108)

In modern India, in spite of learning made available to all, religious hegemony continues. This power is nurtured by those individuals and groups with their own agendas for social control. Within families advocating the arranged marriage system, the opinion of the younger generation is never solicited on the grounds that for children, parents personify living gods and respect for elders follows automatically. This socio-religious hegemony continues to ensure the obedience of the younger generation and the women, by inculcating a culture of not allowing too many inquiries into socio-cultural traditions. Protagonists like Anju (*Sister of My Heart*) and Saroja (*Tamarind Mem*) are always running into conflict with their elders over their questioning of social dogmas.

The 'commodification' of women is even today an intrinsic aspect of the Indian socio-cultural value system. The dominant discourse is selective in its appropriation of historical ideas. The misogynist approach of Manu, the legendary Hindu law-giver of ancient times, labelling woman as property, first her father's then her husband's and son's; is appropriated by patriarchal hegemony (Basham 1967 183). The woman's qualifications and earnings serve to enhance her worth as a commodity in contemporary India. In all crucial instances, it is the hegemonic discourse that commands ultimate power. Lionel Caplan explains:

Nowadays a woman's occupational status as well as her potential earning capacity are also taken into account. Parents of marriageable children recognize the 'bargaining' power which such prospective brides possess, but at the same time suggest that even the most highly qualified young women will only marginally affect the other side's expectations. (Caplan 364)



The fictional narratives portray, in a wealth of detail, the time and money lavished by Hindu families on the marriages of the daughters. Divakaruni describes the ostentatious arrangements for Anju's and Sudha's weddings:

It is the day before our weddings, and the house is filled with frenzied activity. Hordes of men are at work stringing up lights and setting up an enormous tent on the lawn. In the courtyard behind the kitchen, hired cooks bustle around huge clay ununs,<sup>8</sup> constructed for the occasion, where curries and dhals are bubbling. The air is pungent with the aroma of mustard fish and tomato chutney, for many of our out-of-town relatives have arrived already and must be fed. (146)

The complexity and length of the ancient marriage rituals are visible in the marriages depicted in the novels. The writers graft on to their fiction instances of the great expenses incurred in this process by the bride's family. Badami's heroine Saroja comments on the expenditure on the wedding and the discourses dictating such systems:

My father spares no expense for my wedding. A lavish display will, hopefully, draw grooms for my sisters like flies to honey. Our guests will go home and tell their friends, "Raghava's daughter's wedding? What a pity you weren't invited. The food, cooked by Vishnu Bhatta himself, was fit for the gods. Such delicate *pheni* I have never tasted. Aha! You should have seen the arrangements they made for the boy's party. Soap in silver cases for each person, two-sided *zari* saris for all women, all, mind you, even the unimportant ones. (180-1)

In spite of her father's lavish expenditure, Saroja marries an older man as her family is not rich enough to negotiate for the best bridegroom. Badami situates Saroja's marriage within the urban Indian middle-class mores of the 1960s. But certain features, especially the financial pressures on the bride's family still predominate within a majority of contemporary Hindu arranged marriages. In the 1990s, describing wedding expenses for the girl's natal family in urban India, Lionel Caplan wrote:

Turning now to their marriage expenses; these are of three principal kinds:

(a) the expenditure on the wedding (mainly the reception – to which considerable numbers are invited )– and (b) the bride’s gold tali or wedding necklace, the jewels, cooking vessels and the furniture which a woman brings to her new conjugal unit; and (c) the bridegroom price which her household transfers to that of the bridegroom. (Caplan 368)

The expenses incurred by the widowed mothers, Gourima (*Sister of My Heart*) in particular, for the marriages of Anju and Sudha illustrate the greed and exploitation prevalent within the system. This unjust system based on hegemonic measures of prestige-advancement leads to Gourima’s selling the family bookshop and incurring severe health problems to satisfy the demands of the dominant norms of the patriarchy.

Though customs vary according to factors such as region, caste, community, sect and such other factors, there are certain basic common features of any Hindu marriage such as the *Kanyadaan* or giving away of the bride by the father to the groom, the *Panigrahana* and the very essential *Saptapadi*, the seven steps around the holy fire that with cited promises and vows, bind man and woman together as husband and wife for all eternity. But here too many complexities and often ambiguities are present, demonstrating the pitfalls existing if the layman attempts to practise the rituals without the all important presence of the priests, who are considered to hold all keys to the ambiguities.<sup>9</sup> The priests here appear to fulfil the functions of “traditional intellectuals”. Using Gramscian terminology, Marcia Landy explains: “In the case of ruling groups, traditional intellectuals provide the intermediate element. The subaltern groups must develop their intellectuals in the formation of their own power base”(Landy 23). They maintain an order which firmly establishes the control of hegemony, disregarding the need for providing a basic understanding of the marriage system and the vows to the laymen. Esteve Morera elaborates further:

Gramsci compares the use of Latin in the Middle Ages in Europe to

the ideographical writing of Chinese culture, for although the two phenomena are intrinsically heterogeneous, they performed 'the same function: that of transmitting the culture of a ruling class not rooted in the cultural and linguistic reality' of the national masses. (78)

Substituting 'Sanskrit' for 'Latin', this theory is very useful in studying the Indian social and historical situation. In the past learning was the domain of Brahmins. They were the scholars of Sanskrit, and in effect became the interpreters for the Gods. They manipulated the cultural discourse to establish their own hegemony. A.L. Herman, a scholar of Hinduism explains:

the priests made two momentous discoveries that transformed ordinary Brahminism into extraordinary Brahminism: First they discovered that the holy chantings of the sacrifice could compel the Gods to attend the sacrifice and do the bidding of the priests. Ritual sacrifice turned into ritual compulsion . . . . Second they discovered that they didn't need the Gods at all but only their Power. With that Power one could get the wealth, the forgiveness, victory and heaven. The Power was what was important, after all, and not the Gods. (61-2)

The authors use the voices of their female protagonists to question the controlling forces of traditional intellectualism. Through the creation of characters like Kamini (*Tamarind Mem*), Sudha and Anju (*Sister of My Heart*), Aru and Charu (*A Matter of Time*), a new order appears to form wherein traditional intellectualism changes face to incorporate a different perspective and understanding of the dominant discourse through the creation of a new order. The Gramscian ideology of development of the 'organic intellectuals' of the new order would appear validated through the evolving of the fictional characters as the narratives progress. Landy writes:

Aware that traditional intellectuals are created by institutions and not by divine *fiat*, Gramsci sought to identify those forces that shaped them and to draw the most useful lessons from tradition in the creation of organic intellectuals . . . . The traditional intellectual serves directly or indirectly to legitimize the power of the prevailing institutions. Each new class that has

developed has created its own organic intellectuals, those who serve as carriers of new ideas and are the legitimizers of its power. (31)

Gramsci stresses the development of critical self-consciousness in the process of creation of organic intellectuals in society. He writes :

Critical self-consciousness signifies historically and politically the creation of intellectual cadres : a human mass does not “distinguish” itself and does not become independent “by itself”, without organising itself (in a broad sense) and there is no organisation without intellectuals, that is, without organisers and leaders.

(1968 67)

Badami's *Tamarind Mem* illustrates the manipulative exercise of religious hegemony through the character of the priest-astrologer, Raghothammachar. The exploitative element entering the hegemonic discourse is seen in the priest's manipulation of Saroja's father's social situation. Saroja recalls her father's consultations with the astrologer: “ ‘I will pick a date for you at no extra charge,’ offers Raghothammachar magnanimously, already planning to make up for that loss at the wedding, by asking for a silk *dhoti* with two lines of gold instead of one, perhaps”(176). The Gramscian critic, Dominic Strinati states that Gramsci understood hegemony as a cultural and ideological tool of control used by dominant groups in society to obtain and maintain dominance over subordinate groups. He asserts that according to Gramsci: “the hegemony of a political class meant . . . that that class had succeeded in persuading the other classes of society to accept its own moral, political and cultural views”(165).

That such consensual control sooner or later develops into exploitation by the ruling classes is seen in the manipulation of the sacred ritual of marriage by the vested interests. Badami uses the novel as an instrument to question the faults inherent within the dominant discourse. The main defect of the system is that tradition is not always followed in reverence, but often in fear of divine retribution and worry about social disgrace. Appa, Saroja's father is definitely not happy with the expenses he is incurring for her marriage; but the hegemonic

pressure of maintaining social prestige makes him follow the prescribed socio-cultural norms. Atrey and Kirpal explain the force of this Indian cultural discourse:

Marriage is the destiny of the woman; to remain unmarried is suggestive of unnaturalness. It also brings shame to the woman's family. It is the parents' social obligation and moral responsibility to get their daughter married before she passes the marriageable age. (101)

This understanding of Hindu ritual provides further insight into the socio-cultural aspects of Hindu life which in turn lead to greater comprehension of the factors influencing a marriage. Pandit Altekar, a scholar of Hinduism explains that a father who does not get his daughter married at the right age is considered a sinner in traditional Hindu thought (8). A daughter's marriage based on factors of caste status and social prestige accompanied by rigid rituals to solemnize the union, is still a vital aspect of Hindu socio-cultural discourses. But in the present, what has to be understood is that such rituals were formulated during a particular era in history. The contemporary educated Hindu has to question the relevance of such systems within the present socio-cultural discourse. As elaborated by Esteve Morera, Gramsci's theories further clarify the argument:

Two main issues are related to the transience of social phenomena. On the one hand, we must understand their temporality, the patterns and the rhythms of historical time; on the other hand, the reasons for the change, or historical causation must also be explained. Historical time is in itself an important issue, for it gives a sense to the events occurring at a specified epoch. One of the reasons why Gramsci rejects sociological schemas is that they neglect the conditions of time and place or they are conceived as 'abstract universals outside time and space.' (75)

Time moves on creating new history, and so do human beings. As the fiction illustrates, a certain section of the Hindu urban middle-class society appears to cling to the norms of the hegemonic system as if an alternative system is unthinkable. They appear immutably fixed within a particular point of socio-cultural history. Benedetto Fontana, the Gramscian scholar, writes:

Human beings, for Gramsci, are not ‘givens’ whose nature is immutable and fixed: they are not “essences” whose existence is already determined. They are a “becoming,” ineradicably rooted in the historical process. Indeed, human beings are history, both as actors who through their practical activities make history, and as thinkers who contemplate themselves in history. Gramsci’s political theory, therefore, is a discourse on the genesis and formation of the historical subject. (1)

Gramsci’s ideas lend credence to the hegemonic grafting of ritualistic control of everyday matters in Indian marriages. But the narratives express the ability to give a new form to the historical subject; to think up an alternative to the traditional face of the Hindu marital relationship. Gopal and Sumi (*A Matter of Time*) portray the inner capacity of a couple to grow and overcome the burdens of their pasts and build a marriage focusing on the positive aspects within themselves and their children.

As discussed earlier, the absence of friendship amongst married couples is reflected within the narratives, the older couples like Saroja and Murthy (*Tamarind Mem*) and Sita and Mahadevan (*The Thousand Faces of Night*) are just spouses, not friends at all and their extended families prefer it that way. The tragic overtones of the lack of friendships in Indian arranged marriages are seen in the relations between the younger generations too. Anju and Sunil and Sudha and Ramesh (*Sister of My Heart*) or Mahesh and Devi (*The Thousand Faces of Night*) are none of them engaged in relationships based on friendship. They are merely joined in matrimony. Veena Das asserts:

a newly married couple ignore each other completely during the day. For instance on arriving home in the evening, the husband may exchange greetings with everybody except his wife. Similarly, the wife is required to abstain from showing any interest in his presence. The myth is sustained that his wife is a stranger for a man.<sup>10</sup>

(1993 207-8)

Various interest groups do their best to ensure that there is always an unnatural shame accompanying the idea of demonstrating conjugal love overtly. The married couples unconsciously comply with this notion of shamefulness by blindly adhering to a discourse clearly designed to prevent them forging strong bonds of love and friendship. It is a complicity born of fear of social stigma and pressure of superiors. The interests of the extended families are constantly safeguarded. By keeping from the individual spouses the knowledge that the Hindu marriage ritual stresses the bond of friendship being formed between man and wife, the upholders of the dominant discourse appear to be perpetrating a fraud upon the newly wed couples.

Deshpande's characters, Gopal and Sumi appear to be the only ones who have a marital relationship based on friendship, liking and respect for each other. The author implies that the ability to be exceptions to socially enforced rules lies within individuals. Sumi has been able to move on, in spite of the hostility between Kalyani and Shripati, and build her own marriage. Gopal is luckier in having witnessed the warmth of the relationship between his half-sister Sudha and her husband P.K., who raised him after his parents' death. The apathy reflected in not trying to understand the deeper meanings of the Hindu wedding mantras also rests with the couple who slip into the comfort zone of merely submitting to consensual control thereby avoiding all conflict. Sudha (*Sister of My Heart*) and Devi (*The Thousand Faces of Night*), are unable to confront their domineering mothers; whereas Anju (*Sister of My Heart*) actually uses marriage as an escape route from a stiflingly conservative life in Calcutta. This issue is explored further in Chapter Three.

It is important to note that traditionally marriage was an important feature in a society that was properly organised and free from licentiousness and promiscuity. The concept of marriage led to the presence of settled homes curtailing the instability in society. Sarma comments: "The Hindu society, though thoroughly superstition-laden was not promiscuous, it was a society

well-regulated and strictly ordered”(Introduction x). Substantiating this view is Dr. C.P.R. Aiyar’s observation:

In the Hindu view of life, ideals and activities were considered to be inter-dependent, society was viewed as indivisible, and on the reconciliation and equipoise of duties and obligations, whether of individuals, classes or functionaries, the harmony not only of a particular State or community but of the whole creation was held to depend. (ibid)

The notion of such harmony is not borne out by social data. A close scrutiny of the above arguments substantiates the idea that in the life of a Hindu, family and community possess a status far above that in importance of the individual husband wife relationship. The term ‘family’ here would also include the extended natal families of the spouses. It would not include just the narrow unit of husband, wife and children. Aileen Ross comments that there is evidence that city life does not always lead to disintegration of the joint family system (21). Control of the extended family remains, in spite of growing industrialization and urbanization.

Aspects of the importance placed on extended families in Hindu lives are grafted on to the fictional reality by the authors studied. These aspects of the cultural world of the novels are explored further in Chapter Three. Saroja’s (*Tamarind Mem*) family includes the widowed Aunt Chinna and the Chatterjee household in Divakaruni’s novel is an extended family consisting of the cousins, their mothers and widowed aunt. Abha Pishi, in particular occupies a position of great importance in the midst of the family. Sudha describes their Pishi:

Dressed in austere white, her greying hair cut close to her scalp in the orthodox style . . . , she is the one who makes sure we are suitably dressed for school in the one-inch-below- the- knee uniforms the nuns insist on. She finds for us, miraculously, stray pens and inkpots and missing pages of homework. She makes us our favourite dishes . . . But most of all Pishi is our fount of information, the one who tells us the stories our mothers will not, the secret, delicious, forbidden tales of our past. (4-5)



In Deshpande's novel too, Sumi and Gopal have very close links with their extended families. Sita (*The Thousand Faces of Night*) is the only one who does not reflect the norm. She keeps relatives at bay, but their importance in the social context is seen in Sita's need to have Devi present a good image to them. It is considered necessary for Devi's future marital prospects. Devi narrates:

The first step was my re-entry into the extended family, a return successfully orchestrated by Amma . . . Amma entertained them all, a picture of dignity and charm, fielding their questions with expert counter-attacks. I, it seemed was expected to do little. My very presence, the new silk sari, my unforgotten Tamil, the gold chain around my neck were enough. (14)

The basic philosophy governing Hinduism has always stressed the importance of the stage of householder and family relations in an individual's life. A.L. Herman explains the householder or '*Grhastha*' stage in a person's life as dictated by Hindu rituals:

The householder takes wife and children and since he supports the other three *asramas*,<sup>11</sup> lives out the prescribed period of his life working at the vocation inherited from his father. . . . The *asramas* were also open to qualified women. (76)

The novels examine the intrinsically hollow adherence to essential Indian philosophies. Shripati, a tradition bound man in all respects, has even married his sister's daughter<sup>12</sup> but has never accorded her the status of a human being, let alone a wife. He does not speak to her and uses a bell to summon her if required (Deshpande 39). The distant relationship between Saroja and Dadda can also never be dubbed a sharing partnership between friends. Saroja feels that her parents have tied her: "to a man so old and silent I feel I am enclosed in the quiet of a funeral ground"(Badami 192). Even relationships such as that of Gourima and her husband Bijoy, in spite of shared affection, are unequal in standing. He cares for her, but never heeds her good advice, especially when she tells him to exercise greater caution in handling the family finances (Divakaruni 29).

The Indian historian and cultural expert Paul Thomas discusses the idea of India essentially being a matriarchate system in his study *Kama Kalpa*. The original freedom and position enjoyed by women especially in pre-Vedic times stem from this aspect. Thomas asserts: “Traces of the matriarchate are also discernible in the religious literature and practices of the Hindus. There is no civilised community in the modern world except the Hindus who perceive the Godhead as feminine”(5).

In modern Hinduism, the mother goddess as nurturer and nourisher is important. The culinary and culture studies scholar, Chitrita Banerji explains:

Food and worship have been interconnected in Hindu thinking from ancient times. In one of the Upanishads, the human soul, freed from mortality, is described as roaming the universe, chanting joyously, ‘I am food, I am an eater of food.’ Durga, goddess of deliverance, is eulogized in hymns as she who exists as nourishment in all creatures. (11)

A young girl is reared on myths of Savitri<sup>13</sup> and Sita,<sup>14</sup> never on tales of Kali’s destruction of the oppressive demonic world. Atrey and Kirpal stress the fact that from childhood, an Indian girl is nurtured on the mythological characters of Sita, Savitri and Gandhari<sup>15</sup> (70) and is thus indoctrinated into accepting the man as her superior. The fiction illustrates how the hegemonic discourse is fostered by mothers through proverbs such as ‘*Pati Param Guru*’<sup>16</sup> (Divakaruni 53) and “a woman is her husband’s shadow”(Badami 214). Verbal communication between mothers and daughters perpetuates this discourse: “A woman internalizes these patriarchal ideals and images and learns to accept her condition passively. In turn, she also works to inculcate the same ideals in every girl child in the family”(Atrey and Kirpal 71).

The dominant discourse continues to exercise further sway by the means of caste-endogamy. This aspect of Hindu arranged marriages will be discussed in detail in Chapter Four. Marriage within the same caste perpetuates a system whereby the subjugation of individuals to societal and group needs is paramount.

Life's main relationship is dominated by the need to keep within a group leaving all personal preferences aside. Dowry is an important factor in such caste-based arranged marriages. The novelsist do not neglect this harsh aspect of the Hindu arranged marriage. Sunil's father's displeasure is evident in Sunil's refusal to let him demand a dowry from Anju's family. During the marriage negotiations with the Chatterjees, Mr. Mazumdar's greed for dowry is evident in his insinuation that "the Bhaduris of Bowbajar had offered a significant dowry"(Divakaruni 132). Arranged marriages further enhance chances of extracting a dowry from the girl's family. According to Lionel Caplan, in urban India:

What seems to be occurring . . . is that alongside the notion of dowry as a 'familial fund' -- to use Goody's<sup>17</sup> (1973) familiar term—whereby a household (cohabiting, commensal group) confers on a marrying daughter a portion of its estate which, by custom, remains her possession, there is an increasing tendency for resources, in the form of bridegroom price, to be alienated from both the daughter and her natal unit. These become part of a 'societal fund' circulating among households within particular marriage circles, as wealth received for sons is used to marry daughters.

(Caplan 360)

Sudha's (*Sister of My Heart*) and Saroja's (*Tamarind Mem*) marriages bring out this aspect of using the resources acquired from the girl's natal family as a 'societal fund' for the use of the groom's family. The authors focus on manipulation from natal as well marital families. But Sudha's marriage is a clear case in instance where she does not even get her wedding jewellery back. What the novels clearly depict is the parental expectations of male children as future pension funds and daughters as subservient upholders of caste and class endogamy. Vested interests flourish in the guise of patriarchal traditions.

Caste has rigid rules which often facilitate a high degree of consensual control. This caste-based rigidity can also open the path for the exploitation of the bride's family. Marriage within the same caste and sub-caste might possibly

mean paying out a dowry to obtain the right groom. When the factor of caste endogamy assumes priority, the choice of grooms for the girl's family becomes rather limited and they might be faced with dowry demands from the family possessing the boy with what they consider all the right attributes. Also marriage is considered a union of two families rather than individuals with factors such as lineage, heredity, dowry, et cetera to be considered. Therefore, inter-caste or inter-religious marriages are not the norm in arranged marriage situations as they constitute loss of status in the caste hierarchy.

The fictional works by the selected Indian women novelists are all located within a strong Indian cultural ethos (see Chapter Three). The fiction has grown from and within that particular cultural landscape which is middle and upper middle class India and in most cases portrays Brahmin households. The marital lives of the protagonists as depicted by the authors have their roots in authentic Indian socio-cultural situations. However, the changes and continuities of such situations in urban Indian households have been used by the authors in their fictional portrayals in different ways. Since caste plays a leading role in the decision-making process in Hindu marriages, the authors have incorporated this important aspect into their works. Sudha's family, especially her mother, Nalini, does not even consider Ashok's proposal because he, unlike the Chatterjees, does not come from a Brahmin family (Divakaruni 115). Devi, Sita (*The Thousand Faces of Night*) and Saroja (*Tamarind Mem*), are all women who have been married within the rigid rules laid out by the caste system. As they are Brahmins, the caste rules are more rigid and the ancient Hindu customs still hold sway. With regard to marriage rules in ancient India, A.L Basham writes: "The couple were usually of the same caste and class, but of different *gotras* and *pravaras*,<sup>18</sup> if they were of high class"(1967 167).

After studying certain Hindu ideas on the subject, the anthropologist Mary Douglas, in her study of pollution and taboo within social groups, observes that

the woman is considered the entry point of all pollution, thus her purity appears to ensure the purity of the race:

Since place in the hierarchy of purity is biologically transmitted, sexual behaviour is important for preserving the purity of caste . . . The caste membership of an individual is determined by his mother, for though she may have married into a higher caste, her children take their caste from her. Therefore women are the gates of entry to the caste. (126)

The Indian novelists skilfully depict such age-old concepts within the social discourses of contemporary urban India, in spite of apparent modernization. For example, it is considered fitting for a divorced and pregnant Sudha to accept Ashok's proposal of marriage, as her situation has impaired her purity within the group and she can now accept the hand of a lower-caste man. Sudha notes ironically that: "My mother is absolutely against me turning Ashok down"(Divakaruni 284). Nowhere in this situation does Nalini take Sudha's personal happiness into account. What assumes paramount importance is the social situation and family considerations: " 'Be a little practical', Nalini urges her daughter"(ibid).

Exploring further the socio-cultural scenario of contemporary arranged marriages in urban India, it is interesting to read this example of a matrimonial advertisement in *The Times Of India*<sup>19</sup>, a leading metropolitan daily:

Required beautiful, fair, convented, bride between 22-25 years from similar background for handsome Bengali Brahmin boy, Chemical engineer/MBA, aged 28 years, 180 cm., settled in USA, only son of well-established family, originally from East Bengal.

(*The Times of India*. Mumbai edition. November 21, 1999)

The advertisement would have been absurd if one could ignore this demeaning expression of human demands and expectations controlled by hegemonic rituals and customs. New terms such as 'convented' have been coined by Indian advertisers in their intensive search for the right match. The term 'convented'

contains within itself many nuances. Its technical interpretation is that it is desirable for the bride to have completed her schooling at a convent/missionary school, where English is the medium of education and girls hailing from such schools have greater fluency in English (see Chapters Three and Five). Also the fees charged by the convent schools are higher than ordinary state-run schools and this denotes the secure financial status of the family and is a matter of prestige. Furthermore, the so-called 'convented' girls are more conversant with Western customs and norms of behaviour, thus making them suitable spouses for educated boys based in the West. The irony lies in the assumption that such 'liberalised' education based on an occidental foundation is not supposed to alter in any way the hegemony-oriented upbringing and character of the chosen bride. Devi's (*The Thousand Faces of Night*) meeting with the bride-hunting Srinivasans reveals this aspect of Indian society:

they were looking for an accomplished bride, a young woman who would talk intelligently to her scientist husband's friends, but who would also be, as all the matrimonial ads in the Sunday papers demanded, fair, beautiful, home-loving and prepared to 'adjust'. (17)

The dichotomy in the requirements of the families is that with regard to girls, it is expected that the girl's imbibing of Western education and knowledge of English has not in any sense led to intellectual application of her learning and infused her with liberalised ideas moving beyond the dictates of the urban Hindu hegemony. This perspective is seen in Mahesh's marital expectations about Devi. He completely ignores her qualifications, including her American masters' degree and expects her to settle down to mundane housewifely duties, completely discarding any emotional and intellectual needs that she might have. He states: "There is so much for you to do at home"(56). The authors use instances of such indifferent pragmatism coupled with the emphasis on financial considerations, to expose the negative aspects of the discourse governing urban arranged marriages. Kamala Ganesh points out:

The capacity to adjust, given so much importance in the socialization of girl and women, does not consist of acceptance alone, but includes the acquisition

of negotiatory skills. The overall outcome of such negotiation may not often be in their favor due to the relations of power in patriarchy, relations which are reflected in patrilineal kinship and operationalized in the household.<sup>20</sup>

(Ganesh 236)

As discussed earlier, the Gramscian notion of consensual control bolsters the dowry system in India. The ancient historical context in which a bride was given gifts has been substantially modified by vested interests. In ancient India, women were given gifts which were termed *Stridhana* and were her property alone. As the Indologist A. L. Basham explains, they were passed on to her female offspring (1967 179). *Stridhana* was not property received by the wife from either her father-in-law or her husband. In contemporary India, this simple means of safeguarding a woman's interest has turned into a means of exploiting her and her natal family as well as an measure of status enhancement. *Stridhana* is still given in the form of a dowry from the bride's side and hardly any social or legal sanctions safeguard the rights of the woman over what is technically her property. They are merely gifts to please the in-laws and enhance her natal family's prestige. The girl's wishes are never considered. The novels provide such instances through the marriages of Saroja (*Tamarind Mem*) and Sudha (*Sister of My Heart*). Aileen Ross also refers to "the element of blackmail which can enter into dowry negotiations" (262), with the bridegroom's family suddenly increasing their demands.

Mrs. Sanyal (*Sister of My Heart*) typifies the rapacious appetite of certain families in modern India. When pregnant and alone, Sudha flees her husband's home and takes hardly any of the jewellery given by her own family. Later she is served divorce papers and she also receives the wedding-card for her husband's second marriage; but never her own jewellery, clothes or any other possessions. Sudha's mother comments: "You'd think she'd at least have had the decency to return Sudha's wedding jewellery now that she's getting a whole new dowry with a new daughter-in-law" (319).

Even in contemporary India, the socio-cultural discourse assumes that a daughter is born to be married, bring honour to her family, yet mostly be a recipient of dishonour unless she becomes the mother of sons. It is a son that is still wanted, pampered and loved in most homes across all strata of Indian society. The economist Amartya Sen, observes: “The low female-male ratio in the Indian population and the lower life expectancy of women are matched by evidence of serious extra deprivation of women in terms of other basic capabilities”(Sen 459).<sup>21</sup>

In her study of Indian women, the American journalist, Elizabeth Bumiller, discusses the importance of a woman’s fertility and the insistent need for male progeny even in the India of the late twentieth-century. Bumiller’s account takes its title from the traditional blessing still used for a new bride: “May you be the mother of a hundred sons”(10). The passing of another decade has not wrought such huge changes that this cultural pressure has totally vanished.

Divakaruni’s book illustrates the sometimes open hostility to the girl-child. Social hegemonic pressure to ensure family lineage through a male heir is the reason behind the hostility. Sudha’s decision to leave her husband’s home to protect her daughter is a flouting of the dominant discourse which goes against her mother’s hegemony-based advice: “ ‘Oh Goddess Durga! What will people say?’ she cries, ‘A pregnant woman without sindur on her forehead! What shameful names will they call your child?’”(260). This situation is a subversion of the basic Hindu traditions manipulated by a discourse with vested interests. Culturally a woman and her offspring are under the protection of the husband. One of the mantras chanted by the bride’s father is binding on the groom’s family:

*She has been fostered by me like a son,  
She is now given to thy son,  
Protect her in love. (Padfield 116)*



Ramesh proves completely ineffective as a protector. Mrs. Sanyal as a mother figure is not Durga, the nourisher, nor Kali, the seeker of justice. Looking for a parallel in Hindu mythology, one comes across the figure of Putana,<sup>22</sup> the demoness who suckled the infant god Krishna<sup>23</sup> on her poisoned breast to kill him. Here she is the mother as destroyer alone. Dayita, the baby girl, is threatened by her own natal family. It is a complete subversion of the traditional discourse under which a girl is protected within her own family at all costs. Even Manu, the main exponent of the Hindu patriarchy states: "Where the female relations live in grief, the family soon completely perishes . . ." (Herman 79).

In modern India enormous changes have occurred within the lives of urban Indian women. There are large numbers of Indian girls and women from the cities and towns pursuing academic qualifications and other careers in India and overseas who are favoured in the matrimonial market. Indian women are involved in almost every type of profession today. Andre Beteille writes: "Change is also coming about in attitudes towards the education of girls; certainly they continue to be prepared for marriage, but more and more of them are being prepared simultaneously for careers"(Beteille 1993 443).<sup>24</sup> But these women face a real dilemma. They step into roles of a type of 'Superwomen' which are highly stressful on both personal and professional levels. It is very much the norm for urban Indian women of particular age groups to combine highly competitive careers in the fields of medicine, management, engineering and other demanding professions with marriage, motherhood as well as the roles of the docile, hardworking daughter-in-law and dutiful daughter. It is another sort of sacrifice expected of the Indian women in the atmosphere of constant adjustment and compromise within which they are reared. When they protest against hegemonic oppression in different ways, like the younger female protagonists, because "they cannot identify themselves with the prescribed social roles and find themselves alienated . . . , there is no guarantee that they will escape loneliness" (Atrey and Kirpal 107).

Within the narratives, hegemony functions in different ways in the lives of the educated Indian women. Devi's (*The Thousand Faces of Night*) entire academic background is disregarded and she is expected to transform herself into the traditional wife busy with her household. Anju (*Sister of My Heart*) is permitted to study, but made to feel obligated at every step. As she is studying, she feels the silent stress of not being the perfect Hindu wife: "Not that there's time to cook. . . . So it'll have to be frozen burritos again. I know what Sunil's going to say. Well he won't really say anything, but he'll give me that look, as if his life is one big burden and guess who's responsible"(196).

Education for women has become a very important issue in India. But it does not always guarantee human rights which women, especially married women in India, have often been denied. Bride-burning by in-laws or suicide due to dowry harassment is a lessening but extant social evil in India. But an educated woman still is in many ways better off in comparison to her uneducated counterparts in the marital home.

In urban India today, within certain sections of society (mainly the middle and upper middle classes), education of both sexes has assumed a position of paramount importance. Sadly enough, this phenomenon is not always one of positive reform. It is the mere addition of a bargaining tool in the matrimonial situation, or a creation of a parental pension fund in the event of lack of sons. The issue of education and its effect on marital discourse as seen in the novels will be focused on in Chapter Five.

The many faces of hegemony constantly dominate the lives of the younger generation. The conflicting dictates of hegemony versus individual emotional needs in the marriage often leave the protagonists feeling that happiness is always elusive. In the troubled early years of her marriage, Anju, recalling the young, handsome Sunil she had first seen, wonders "was this always how

dreams of romance ended?”(Divakaruni 198). Gramsci’s views on hegemony encapsulate the strife-ridden social structure of modern times:

The decisive function of hegemony is, then, that of unifying the heterogeneous and dispersed wills of individuals, of transforming them into a homogeneous, coherent whole. It is because of this decisive function of hegemony which stems from the growing complexity of civil society, that hegemony has acquired its vital strategic role. (Morera 173-4)

Morera elaborates further, asserting that “civil society . . . gives rise to conflicts which are not linked to class-structure, and whose solution is, from an ethical point of view, as important as class-conflicts” (176).

Extended families often comprise the older generation who use the already stressed lives of the modern younger generation against them. A fear of criticism from elders for questioning the mainstream discourse also leads to younger married couples passively obeying the dictates of patriarchy. In an extended family situation, if a boy disobeys parental dictates, the blame is immediately transferred to the wife. Veena Das writes: “attractive young women are often accused of having done *tona* or *jadu* (magic or spells) to their husbands”(Das 1993 208). The older generation use fear of socio-cultural censure as a means of control. Discussing the Machiavellian influence on Gramsci’s historicism, Morera states: “In *The Prince*, Machiavelli<sup>25</sup> wonders whether it is better to be loved or feared but ‘because it is difficult to reconcile them, it is much more secure to be feared than loved, when one cannot have both’(165).

Protagonists such as Sita (*The Thousand Faces of Night*) and Shripati (*A Matter of Time*) have chosen to be feared instead of loved. The reasons for their choices could range from intrinsic insecurities as well as the control exercised on them by the hegemonic discourse. But such protagonists are constantly thwarted by their victims in one way or another. Sumi refuses to fulfil Shripati’s desire for her to be a lawyer and Devi foils all Sita’s controlling plans as she elopes with a musician after an arranged marriage with an executive. Sumi, on the other hand,

receives love and regard from daughters whom she has nurtured as thinking individuals in their own right.

The novels contain illustrations of different generations of urban Indian women. With regard to the older women protagonists, the upper caste woman is seen reverting to type, in spite of education and awareness of their own suffering. Even the understanding and gentle Gourima (*Sister of My Heart*) insists on Anju's early marriage. She says: "I can't take such a big chance. What if I die? Who else is there to take care of you and Sudha? To make sure you get a good match?"(103). Her comments reveal her fear for a daughter left alone and her belief in the protection offered by the patriarchal systems. It is a disturbing feature of the dominant mores, whose validity is questioned through the narratives. Morera relevantly remarks: "It is not the existence of laws of great numbers, but their mechanical nature, that is, the fact that they are spontaneously accepted as natural, that Gramsci denounces"(95). The writers in turn question the social reality through the protagonists' frequent submission to the dominant discourse.

The younger generation of women stress the importance of the positive aspects of education (see Chapter Five). They use it to assert themselves as individuals; especially Deshpande's Sumi, who is never merely someone's wife and daughter, Being a part of her family's history, she emerges to become a person in her own right with her talents blossoming. Fictional narratives portray the educated men, even the younger generation as more strongly bound by the dominant discourse.

In spite of the difference in generation, there is a similarity in Dadda's (*Tamarind Mem*) and Mahesh's (*The Thousand Faces of Night*) conception of a husband's role in a marriage. Both prefer to withdraw into their personae of professionals where family matters are concerned. They are constantly away from home on official work. Their attitude to marriage is that it is a convenient

arrangement. They differ in generation, but they invoke similar reactions in their wives. Devi comments on Mahesh: “he does not believe in talking about ifs and buts, at least not with his wife. All that spewing out of feelings is self-indulgent, he says. It is un-Indian”(49). Saroja says of Dadda: “I have nothing to discuss with this stranger who takes me from one town to another, showing me a whole country” (227).

The Indian marriage does not stress the union of two different entities, namely, the bride and groom. They are frequently discouraged from forging themselves into an independent and mutually supportive unit. The basic feature of the Hindu marriage is the supreme importance of the extended family. Marriage for a newly wed Indian couple usually implies taking on further duties and responsibilities and the arranged marriage is more so. Pleasure is not considered as an aspect of the new life at all for young couples. Familial attitude makes it clear that marriage is for fulfilment of duties and obligations. As Ross points out “romantic love” between husband and wife “could be a disruptive element” (154) in the context of extended family ties. The fiction analysed explores and portrays certain similar conditions. Young men like Mahesh are inculcated with the discourse stressing the dismissive attitude toward romantic love within marriage: “Thank God we Indians are not obsessed with love”(Hariharan 55). This is ironic in a culture which supports the second largest film industry in the world churning out endless tales of romantic love. This dichotomy within the socio-cultural context will be explored in the next chapter.

In Divakaruni’s novel, the newly married Sudha has the responsibility of tending a large family mostly comprised of males, immediately thrust upon her by her mother-in-law. Within a fictional landscape, it is a graphically constructed portrait of Indian parental tyranny and immediate intrusion of the dominant discourse into the marriage of two individuals. The consensual control in contemporary educated families is exercised subtly; in the guise of claiming to make the new bride feel a member of the family. Sudha too falls prey to such a

system as observed by a more discerning Anju: “Throughout the visit, little things bite at me like ants. The way Sudha serves the family at dinnertime, even Ramesh’s younger brothers, . . . The way, whenever Mrs. Sanyal calls her, she drops whatever she’s doing . . . to go to her”(184-5).

This thesis explores in depth the strong opposition faced by married couples in their efforts at identifying strongly with each other as partners and fostering their own unit with privacy and space being allotted for the strengthening and growth of the marital relationship. In particular, the prime importance of the groom’s natal extended family is constantly stressed. In certain instances this role is usurped by the bride’s family, especially if they occupy higher rungs of the socio-economic hierarchy. The consequence in both cases is that the husband-wife relationship lags behind in order of importance and hence, may not emotionally deepen at all, leading often to hidden depression or strife between the married pair. The couple is expected to drop all tasks on hand and attend to the needs of its extended families whenever summoned. Sometimes both families in different ways exercise equal controls over the man and woman. In such circumstances, coupled with the shortage of suitable and adequate accommodation in urban India, it is sometimes nearly impossible to nurture a nuclear unit with strong ties between the spouses and their own children. Veena Das in her studies of Punjabi joint families observes:

One of the very noticeable facts of life in a joint family is that parents of young children hardly ever fondle them in the presence of others . . . to fondle one’s own children and to respond to their demands immediately, is also to cast aspersions on the ability of the family to love them or look after them.

(Das 1993 209)

Within the fiction, the narratives portray the control of the extended family to an extent whereby Ramesh (*Sister of My Heart*) is unable to take his wife for a holiday alone, and ultimately unable to offer even basic protection to his unborn daughter.

The control mechanism is constantly at work. To pander to sentiments of the extended family, the children are deprived of the much-needed physical contact with the parents. If the parents attempt to transgress norms laid down by the family, it may lead to exhibition of great displeasure in the form of taunts, snide comments and even lead to a family quarrel. The narratives show how consensual control constantly intrudes into the nurturing of family life. This form of intrusion continues uninterrupted as the protagonists seem unwilling at times to remove themselves from what they perceive as the cocoon of family shelter. The lives of Shripati (*A Matter of Time*) and Kalyani are dictated by Kalyani's mother Manorama, to such an extent there is no space left for the marriage itself to flourish. His daughter Sumi observes that Shripati is as much a victim of the marriage system as Kalyani herself (168). All marriages, even those of the younger generations such as Anju (*Sister of My Heart*) and Sunil illustrate problems with the extended family as part of the marital discourse. Also evident is an apathy on the part of the couple involved to achieve a solution to these conflicts. To seek solutions, they need to re-examine the existent discourse and replace it with a more rational system. Commenting from the perspective of Gramscian ideology, Esteve Morera writes:

historical necessity becomes effective when there is consciousness of the material conditions that are, so to speak, the backbone of such necessity. Similarly, the consciousness of the existence of the conditions for the solution of social problems imposes a new duty. From this point on, a historical process takes place which can be defined as a struggle of hegemonies, or, . . . , the struggle between different forms of conformism. (119-20)

He explains further:

Without communal life, values would not exist. The existence of moral values is a feature of societies; they are not embedded in the fabric of nature. They are not, however, dependent on the will of individuals. It is social relations which produce principles of right action. For Gramsci, morals originate in material life. In this respect, his theory of ethics is consistent with his theory of the origin of philosophical problems,

according to which it is history, not philosophy itself, which produces philosophical problems. (120)

The above arguments will be examined in detail in Chapter Six. The protagonists create their problems because of the ongoing cycle of hegemonic oppression which does not enable them to discard their pasts. They carry their problems into their marriages and historical and cultural conditions induce an apathy in the name of traditional mores thereby preventing them finding solutions to build stronger marriages.

Many individuals of Indian origin might disagree with the ideas broached so far and would probably present arguments for the necessity of the constant familial presence in the lives of newly weds or young couples as it would mean help with childcare, housework, finances and so on. But many such arguments are rendered null and void as a large number of children reared under grandparental supervision are usually very spoilt and often feature as booty in the conflict between warring generations, paying a heavy emotional price in the process. Ross states: "Children . . . can be just as unhappy in joint families as in smaller ones"(17). Housework too is increased, and rarely ever decreased with additional family members. But the myth is perpetuated and the pattern continues. The interests actually being served are those of the extended family, and hardly ever those of the married couple. Their interests are those that suffer the most.

An interesting feature of the dominant Indian socio-cultural discourse is the constant emphasis of Indian commercial cinema (especially Hindi movies), on the portrayal of the cruel, selfish daughter-in-law who often harbours what is perceived as unseemly ambitions or prioritising self and children, or who does not tend to her husband's parents. She is portrayed as a serious sinner, as are the ungrateful offspring who are influenced by spouses against other family members. Within the popular cinematic discourse it appears unthinkable that



spouses should have common interests, especially with regard to their young offspring. These recurrent themes of Indian cinema and their socio-cultural impact will be dealt with in detail in Chapter Two. Gramsci's theories on mass culture allow the reader to gain greater insights into the effects of Indian cinema on the socio-cultural discourse. Landy states:

Along lines charted by Gramsci, mass media work has made it clear that one cannot discuss questions of ideology, subject positions, and value production without interrogating the nature of representation itself as imbricated, in complex and contradictory terms, in the "culture industry."(4)

In India, cinematic representation has always bolstered the hegemonic culture.

The novels analysed in this thesis provide further insights into the importance placed by Indian society on the bearing of children, particularly male offspring. Religious and socio-cultural dictates prioritise the need for progeny as Hindu religious doctrines emphasise the requirement of children as a pathway to heaven, and Moksha or salvation for the true Hindu. Basham explains: "From the earliest hymns of the *Rg Veda* sons were looked on as great blessings. At least one son was almost essential, to perform funeral rites for his father and thus ensure his safe transit to the other world" (1967 161). The value placed on producing male progeny often appears the sole reason for marital sexual intercourse within a hegemonic discourse. Manisha Roy refers to the lives of middle-aged Bengali couples who cease sexual activity as soon as their children reach marriageable age regardless of their own emotional needs (121).

Sex for the sake of pleasure alone or as an expression of mutual love receives covert social and overt familial condemnation. Given the importance of the sexual arts in ancient India, this approach speaks strongly of the destruction of the initial open views of ancient Indian culture at its point of origin. Basham expounds on sexual relations in ancient India:

Though the learned brahmans who composed smṛti literature and prescribed canons of behaviour for the Indian layman were puritanical

in many respects, they did not disparage physical love. Of the three<sup>26</sup> ends of life the third, pleasure, though less important than the other two, was a legitimate branch of human activity, for which provision had to be made in the scheme of existence. . . . Of all legitimate pleasures sexual pleasure was thought to be the best. (1967 171-2)

The most important treatise on sexual arts is the *Kamasutra* written probably around the Gupta period (*circa* fifth century A.D). It is very comprehensive, detailing sixteen types of kissing alone, and considers the woman's sexual needs on a par with the man's (Basham 1967 171). Veena Das exposes the sharp contrast in modern Indian cultural discourse: "As is well-known, the rules of kinship demand a complete suppression of every expression of sexuality between the husband and the wife"(1993 208).

There appears to be a fear present in the minds of the groom's natal family that if the boy is allowed to spend an excessive amount of time with his new young wife, she might gain a certain amount of emotional and psychological control over him. If this occurred, the hegemony of the family inserting themselves into a position of prime importance into the young couple's life would be threatened. Therefore, the alliance between the young man and his wife must always be rather tenuous in emotional terms. Mrs. Sanyal illustrates the extreme form of this control by keeping Ramesh and Sudha's behaviour under constant scrutiny. Anju notices: "When just the three of us were out for a walk, Ramesh put his arm around Sudha. But when Mrs. Sanyal was around he hardly even looked at her"(Divakaruni 187).

In view of the conservative socio-cultural trends surrounding them, apart from cinema, the only other outlet for sexual fantasy for individuals, especially for young women, is the long-awaited spouse with whom all forms of intimacy have the support of legal, religious and social sanctions attached to them. Fantasy as an element of influence within the marriages sketched in the narratives will be explored later within the thesis (see Chapters Two, Three and Six). An

illustration of this aspect is observed in the youthful Saroja's (*Tamarind Mem*) thoughts regarding the nebulous figure of fantasy that is her future husband:

In my room, I imagine my future husband. He will be gentle and caring, discuss his work with me, talk to me often. My imaginary husband has no face, just a body that drifts tentatively over me. I am too frightened even in my dreams to let that hovering body touch me, for a girl from a good family does not think such shameful thoughts. My mother's voice is there, always, always. (218)

Elizabeth Bumiller details interviews she conducted with urban Indian women about to enter marriage, shedding further light on certain common factors influencing particularly the female psyche in India with regard to arranged marriages. She recounts the acceptance in the attitudes of the young, qualified urban women whose marriages had been arranged by family. She writes: "Women routinely told me that they had decided to marry a man-half-an-hour after the first meeting because they felt it was 'meant to be.' 'It's the biggest gamble of one's life,' said Ritu Nanda . . . 'So why not just leave it to destiny?'"(33). At times, it is also total acceptance of an immensely subordinate status in another family and a complete subjugation of individual will and desire; a total surrender through consensual control. This acceptance is what drives the belief in destiny; the first is used as a rationalisation for the second. "Destiny" is easier to openly accept than one's explicit subservient status. It is also a disavowal of personal responsibility.

The Indian psychoanalyst, Sudhir Kakar states that within an Indian family, the new bride occupies the lowest rung of the familial hierarchy. (Kakar 1981 73) Induction into a new household for the young woman may be accompanied by a great deal of taunting and sarcasm from the husband's extended family, as well as, sometimes being required to adopt an attitude of abject humility and servitude. If the husband attempts to support the wife when she is being chastised, he may also be verbally castigated for what is perceived as disloyalty to his natal family and entrapment in his wife's hands due to demands of sexuality: "Since in theory, a wife is always replaceable, the affection of a man

for one particular woman stands in need of an explanation”(Das 1993 208). When Ramesh (*Sister of My Heart*) accepts an invitation from his widowed mother-in-law without consulting his mother, she makes it clear that such a normal act has been perceived as an insult to her position in her own house: “Am I dead that you think you can arrange whatever you want, do whatever people insist on without even asking my permission?”(206). Control here is coercive and assumes the form of pure tyranny.

As discussed earlier, the family’s interests must always assume paramount importance. Sita (*The Thousand Faces of Night*) discards her first love, the Veena,<sup>27</sup> as her in-laws insist that her passion for music leads to her shortcomings as a daughter-in-law (30). This treatment accorded to the daughter-in-law often stems from the fact that she is regarded very much as an outsider in her husband’s family. A feature of the Indian art of dissimulation is the constant stress laid on the daughter-in-law’s faults; but a denial on the part of her in-laws that they have ever made her feel like an interloper within their family. In an interview with Martin Jacques, the cultural theorist Stuart Hall says: “We never acknowledge that tight-knit communities are founded on exclusion.”<sup>28</sup> The Indian family and kinship system works on a similar principle, which shifts into place with greater force with the presumed threatening presence of a new bride. The above argument is explored in greater detail in Chapters Three and Six.

Deshpande’s novel stands out as a sign of hope for the emotionally rational and humanitarian treatment of young wives by their husband’s families. Sumi is welcomed and respected by Gopal’s elder sister and her family. An interesting feature of the novel is that Gopal has no mother, only a fond and married older sister. The analysis of the arguments in this paragraph is found in detail in Chapter Six.

The novels portray the metamorphosis of frustrated young women into irritable and antagonistic wives and mothers in the process of surviving their stress-

ridden marriages and constant upholding of the dominant discourse. Linked to the emotionally frustrated lives of most female protagonists is the factor of education which they attempt to demand as a right. Saroja's (*Tamarind Mem*) argument against her father is logical when she protests against the needless expenditure on her brother's thread ceremony: "He makes such a big fuss about spending money for my college books, but he can waste it on rubbish like this?"(164). For the level of education that is doled out by their parents or husbands, they often pay a very high price in emotional and psychological terms. Accompanying the attainment of qualifications is a sense of guilt that somewhere family duties have been neglected to achieve them. And because compensation is sought through expectations from the daughter or daughter-in-law that she will perform all tasks to perfection and carry all burdens with equanimity, she will generally do her best. As Atrey and Kirpal explain:

the traditional mores of patriarchy are so deep-rooted in the woman's psyche that she herself cannot easily cast them off nor break her marriage. Although, some of these conditions apply to men too, it is easier for them to annul a marriage or desert a wife. (99)

The male offspring do not escape lightly under any circumstances. Divakaruni's characters provide an interesting glimpse of the parent-son relationship vis-a-vis education. Sunil who has qualified in America and works there, is reminded in rather uncouth terms of the deep debt he owes his father who has spent money to enable him to acquire that level of qualifications (173). These issues will be discussed in Chapter Three in greater detail. It would be considered highly improper if offspring ever raised the issue of the parents deriving satisfaction from the birth and rearing of children. The dominant discourse persists in picturing parents as divine beings who have rendered support to their children in every sense and have made countless sacrifices for them, and cinema too strongly fosters this image. The Indian hegemonic discourse refuses to acknowledge that having children is a self-gratifying issue in itself. This denial

sits strangely with a culture in which lack of offspring is a matter of social and emotional disgrace.

The male protagonists carry their own personal burdens, but in many of the novels are shown to shed responsibility and ties more easily than women. This reflects the Indian socio-cultural discourses whereby men, in spite of functioning often as sole breadwinners, are accorded a definite social status. They develop a sense of self and sometimes in the entire process, selfishness to an unusual degree. For instance, though Sunil is exploited by his father he in turn is insensitive towards Anju's needs. He is selfish enough to remain absorbed in his obsession with Sudha, withdraw into himself and not reach out fully to Anju, even when she miscarries their baby. The novels sometimes portray men as walking away from responsibilities without bothering to offer any explanations for their actions. In Deshpande's novel, Gopal deserts his family in order to seek answers to his own inner philosophical queries. He appears to do so abruptly, burdening Sumi with responsibility of every kind. The path of the *Vanaprastha* is chosen by him without even having completed his duties of *Grihastha* life. Being a man, he has used the socio-cultural discourse for his own whim. Even living in the same house, the men appear to withdraw to an extent to which they become invisible as husbands. The narratives bring out this aspect of marital relations through characters like Mahadevan (*The Thousand Faces of Night*), Shripati (*A Matter of Time*) and Dadda (*Tamarind Mem*). They appear more connected to their offspring than their wives. It may be considered as an aspect of Indian cultural norms, whereby it is deemed unseemly and disgraceful to express in public one's love for a wife. Examining the Indian family situations, Sudhir Kakar analyses that

custom, tradition and the interests of the extended family demand that in the realignment of roles and relationships initiated by marriage, the roles of the husband and wife, . . . , be relegated to relative inconsequence and inconspicuousness. Any signs of a developing attachment and tenderness within the couple are discouraged by the elder family members by either belittling or forbidding the open expression of these feelings. Every effort is made to hinder

the development of an intimacy within the couple which might exclude other members of the family, especially the parents. Oblique hints about 'youthful infatuations,' or outright shaming virtually guarantee that the young husband and wife do not publicly express any interest in (let alone affection for) each other; and they are effectively alone together only for very brief periods during the night. (1981 74)

Kakar's views substantiate the earlier arguments laid out in this chapter about the extended family's complicity in maintaining the oppressive patriarchal hegemony.

Certain traditional patterns are now being rearranged with the onset of urbanisation, the influence of Westernisation and increasing levels of female education. But on certain levels change has not really occurred as much as the same pattern has merely refashioned itself in a slightly different arrangement. Discourses of expectations and control systems are still very much in place, sometimes under different headings with altered subtitles. The occasional impatience of the better-educated and stressed younger generation is usually dubbed as insensitivity and total lack of consideration for elders. For instance, even as far back as 1961, analysing the highly controversial mother-in-law - daughter-in-law relationship, Aileen Ross observed:

Two of the main factors which have increased the potential tension between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law is that, first of all, the daughter-in-law is now no longer a child when she is married but a young woman who has more self-confidence, knowledge and experience and is thus much harder to bend to her will. In the second place, daughters-in-law now usually have more education than their mothers-in-law. They have learned new theories of child care, housekeeping and personal behaviour. They know more about the outside world. All this challenges the mother-in-law's previous supreme position as an adult adviser and source of knowledge, and tends to enhance the friction between them, particularly if they live in the same house. (171)

To repeat, the four novels are located within a specific socio-cultural urban Indian milieu, depicting upper-middle class Indian Hindu families from the

upper castes. The hegemonic systems as inflicted through parental pressures feature as a recurrent theme throughout the narratives. Often noticeable is an apparent inability on the part of the protagonists to identify and grapple with the main roots of the existing problems. They sometimes let things remain static as if there is no alternative. Marcia Landy's comments on Gramscian theories support this: "An important element in Gramsci's work is the identification of existing antagonisms and non-compatibility of specific social groups as a preliminary step to building toward new hegemonic formations, a prerequisite of social transformation"(8).

The younger generation of protagonists and mainly the female protagonists appear to be instituting a process of questioning the hegemonic discourses as well as slowly building points of resistance to them. Sudha's (*Sister of My Heart*) walking away from a marriage which endangered her unborn daughter is a huge step toward resisting the oppressive patriarchal systems. Less dramatic, but no less powerful is Sumi's rebuilding her life and charting a new course as playwright after Gopal's desertion.

With regard to the issue of questioning and reforming the actual cultural discourses, Gramsci adds a word of caution emphasising another aspect of the issue:

Posing questions, developing theories, and making them assume the character of social forces is an exercise that must begin with the actual culture of the people to be persuaded. Failing to pose the questions in an appropriate manner may result in emphasizing undesirable elements of the old culture, thus subverting the new one. (Morera 44)

The authors appear to offer a similar perspective with regard to the formation of new cultural structures within the existing social system. The novels express the need for a complete, but sympathetic reconstruction of the socio-cultural discourses dominating the urban Indian arranged marriages if greater personal happiness is to be sought. The reform is also necessary to further the



development of the couple as individuals where they do not exist as mere extensions of the family's needs. Unless this occurs, many arranged marriages will continue to run the risk of existing merely as convenient arrangements.

*I flick open the lid unthinkingly, expecting it to be empty, but it isn't. A wisp of cloth flutters from it: a handkerchief, my wedding handkerchief, that delicate white lawn bordered with embroidered good-luck lotuses. I bury my face in it, trying to recall that far-off day. It seems I smell the marriage-fire, the priest's reedy, chanting voice, the turmeric rubbed into my skin for luck. The smell of a long-dissipated dream.*

*Sister of My Heart (314)*

## Chapter Two: The Influence of Cinema

*Ashok and I, that old tempting dream which began at the movies—but no, its true beginning was at the fairy tales. Now the last obstacle has been crumbled, the last mountain of skull bones crossed, the last monster beheaded. The last, best magic worked: the prince and princess turned into ordinary humans, but still finding each other worthy of love.*

*Sister of My Heart (309)*

The term ‘cinema’, here refers to commercial Indian movies, filmed in Hindi and shot in Mumbai (the entire Hindi film industry is mostly referred to as ‘Bollywood’). Some of the selected fiction to be analysed later also has references to Tamil cinema, which too has enormous mass influence. The two industries often overlap, as actors from Tamil films very often act in Hindi films and vice versa. The Indian film industry is one of the oldest in the world and also one of the most prolific in production. The critic and scholar, Vijay Mishra writes:

The massive size of Indian cinema is obvious from the statistics: eight hundred films a year shown in more than thirteen thousand predominantly urban cinemas, viewed by an average of 11 million people each day, and exported to about a hundred countries.

Between 1913, (when . . . (Dadasaheb) Phalke produced Raja Harishchandra, the first Indian film) and 1981 more than fifteen thousand feature films had been produced in India. Almost as many films have been produced since 1981. By 1983 it was India’s sixth-largest industry, grossing around \$600 million annually and employing around three hundred thousand workers. (1)

Mishra further observes that the films essentially and traditionally have always portrayed a cultural ethos that is Northern Indian in origin (3), that is the culture of the Hindi-speaking masses, mainly a culture identifiable with that of the state of Uttar Pradesh (India’s largest state with Hindi as the mother-tongue). Through such cultural depictions a hegemony is created leading to dominance of a particular socio-cultural ideology through film and in turn often blending with social mores practised in society at large.

Mishra claims that: “cinema remains the cultural dominant<sup>29</sup> of India”(ibid). He goes on to state:

In the context of Indian commercial cinema generally Hindi cinema or Bombay (Bollywood) Cinema is the largest player. It is also the model for popular regional cinema and is in this respect closer to being an all-India cinema. Although there is something rather artificial about the culture that Bombay cinema constructs—a culture that is built around a (male) North Indian Hindi-speaking subject---it does give rise to the possibilities of a “shared experience” that may, if we wish to extend the argument further, make “the people produce itself continually as national community” (Balibar and Wallerstein, 1991 93)<sup>30</sup> or transform them into the “abstract ‘national’ subject” (Rajadhyaksha, 1999 137)<sup>31</sup>. (ibid)

Hindi commercial cinema is the all-time symbol of Indian mass culture or popular culture. It is erroneously considered to represent essential ‘Indianness’, that of the grassroots variety as opposed to the selective representation offered by ‘art films’ which is considered to target a select audience of educated urbanites of secure financial standing. In this fashion commercial Hindi cinema has, over the decades established its position as a ‘cultural dominant’ within the Indian socio-cultural discourse. According to the cultural theorist, Frederic Jameson:

The theory of mass culture—or mass audience culture, “popular” culture, the culture industry, as it is variously known—has always tended to define its object against so-called high culture without reflecting on the objective status of this opposition. As so often, positions in this field reduce themselves to two mirror images, which are essentially staged in terms of value. Thus the familiar motif of *elitism* argues for the priority of mass culture on the grounds of the sheer number of people exposed to it; the pursuit of high or hermetic culture is then stigmatized as a status hobby of a small group of intellectuals. (9)

Hindi commercial cinema generally follows the patterns of melodrama.<sup>32</sup> There are stock characters who evoke stock responses. The villain is so innately evil that he has no redeeming features. For instance, Amrish Puri as the larger than life Mogambo in the 1986 film *Mr. India* or Kulbhushan Kharbanda as Shakal in *Shaan* (1981) appear more as epitomes of the wicked characters rather than individuals with villainous traits. The

heroes and heroines embody all the main virtues of honesty, chastity, kindness and so on. In the 2001 film *Nayak*, the hero Anil Kapoor is so perfect as the chief minister of a state that he is worshipped as a god by the masses. Melodrama inherently reinforces the social *status quo*, that is, it is essentially an instrument of hegemony. “In melodrama man remains undivided, free from the agony of choosing between conflicting imperatives and desires”(Smith 7). When the melodramatic plots of Hindi cinema for instance reassert the subordinate position of women, allocate paramount importance to mother-son relations or stress the duties of children to parents often from an irrational perspective; the social effect is noticeable. It further strengthens the hold of the dominant discourse over socio-cultural norms.

The Indian psychoanalyst Sudhir Kakar remarks on similarities between fairytales and Hindi cinema:

Common to both Hindi films and fairy tales is the oversimplification of situations and the elimination of detail, unless the detail is absolutely essential. The characters of the film are always typical, never unique, and without the unnerving complexity of real people. The Hero and the Villain, the Heroine and her Best Friend, the Loving Father and the Cruel Stepmother, are never ambivalent, never the mixed ticket we all are in real life. But then, unlike in novels, the portrayal of characters in film is neither intended to enhance our understanding of the individual complexities of men and women nor to assist our contemplation of the human condition. Their intention is to appeal to the child within us, to arouse quick sympathies and antipathies, and thus encourage the identifications that help us to savour our fantasies more keenly. (1996 28)

Indian commercial cinematic discourse greatly influences a population of which a majority is in the throes of dogmatic traditional hegemony. Large numbers within this audience may not have access to higher education and thus absorb more deeply the hegemonic messages conveyed.

The subculture created by Hindi commercial cinema marks many aspects of youth life and culture in urban India. In India, film dialogues very commonly find their way into daily speech. Kakar writes:

Even film speech is reminiscent of real speech. Thus the frequently heard admonition in 'Indinglish,'<sup>33</sup> 'Don't *maro filmi* dialogues, *yaar*.' (Don't spout dialogues from films at me, friend), is often addressed to someone expressing highly inflated sentiments of friendship, love, or hostility which typify the exchanges between the characters of Indian cinema. (1996 27)

The continual effect of cinema on Indian society is an everyday feature of life in India. "Watched by almost 15 million people every day, popular cinema's values and language . . . have begun to influence Indian ideas of the good life and the ideology of social, family and love relationships (Kakar 1996 25). The maximum effect can be perceived in the perspectives developed by urban Indian middle-class youth on love and romance. Wish-fulfilment or fantasy too comes into play in such a situation and assists in further strengthening the dominance of the patriarchal hegemony. Melodrama is fantasy in that it deals in structures of wish-fulfilment, of happy endings in which the dominant values of society are reinforced. Examining various aspects of melodrama as a genre, Smith comments:

The essential point is that resolutions of triumph or defeat indicate not different dramatic structures but simply alternative formulations of the same conflict, opposite extremes of the same melodramatic spectrum.

Such clear-cut endings offer an audience emotional pleasures equally clear-cut and extreme. (9)

Within the Indian cinema's discourse, melodrama often reaches a pitch of excessive violence in order to achieve happy endings echoing the patriarchal discourse. The means to this end appear unimportant and the desired consequences are highlighted. Hegemony disrupts social rightness in an effort to maintain consensual control. Amitabh Bachchan,<sup>34</sup> the Indian superstar of the 1970s and 80s usually played the hero who rights all wrongs through his physical prowess. He was the anti-hero who becomes the ultimate hero. The success of his films such as *Zanjeer* (1973), *Deewar* (1974), *Sholay* (1975) testify to this discursive strategy within cinema.

Kakar focuses on the element of fantasy dominant in Indian cinema:

I see cinema as the primary vehicle for shared fantasies of a vast number of people living on the Indian subcontinent who are both culturally and psychologically linked. I do not use 'fantasy' in the ordinary sense of the word, with its popular connotations of whimsy, eccentricity, or triviality, but as another name for that world of imagination which is fuelled by desire and which provides us with an alternative world where we can continue our longstanding quarrel with reality. Desire and fantasy are, of course, inexorably linked . . . . Fantasy is the *mise-en-scene* of desire, its dramatization in a visual form.

(1996 25)

But continued exposure to Indian cinema has perverted the hegemonic discourse to include certain anti-social and dubious features. Many Hindi films made in the 1960s,<sup>35</sup> especially those starring screen-idols of the times, such as Joy Mukherji and Shammi Kapoor, reiterate such behaviour patterns. The hero's teasing of the heroine borders almost on sexual harassment (albeit with romantic overtones) and the girl inevitably falls in love with the hero. It established a pattern already in existence from earlier decades and it continues in present day cinema. Subjugation of the female is a constant feature and most importantly, it has led to the creation of a parallel subculture within most strata of Indian society whereby young men consider eve-teasing a form of macho appeal rather than sexual harassment. There is a gender-bias in this harassment, a reinforcing of hegemonic values underlining the concept of women as sex-objects and commodities. As discussed in Chapter One, commodification of women is an existing feature of the Indian socio-cultural discourse. This social problem is illustrated in Badami's portrayal of the harassment of the young Saroja by local louts:

One morning the two loafers on our street, . . . those rascals who loiter near the corner shop, whistle at me.

"Haiyah, my heart!" One of them thumps his chest. "Look at her walk, chhammak-chhammak! Ah! I will die with the ecstasy of watching her."

My middle sister tells Amma and she changes my hair-style.

"Think you are a film star!" she mutters. (161)

Ironically, the mother blames Saroja, as Indian cultural norms place the onus of modesty and good reputation completely on a young girl who has always to bow to parental control.

Commercial Hindi cinema allots women a highly subordinate position within a rigidly patriarchal discourse. Women in Hindi commercial cinema are positioned within a rigidly patriarchal discourse. Gramsci's observations on mass culture assist in explaining the specific manner of locating women within Indian cinematic ideology :

Gramsci anticipates not only the question of how women are positioned in verbal language but also in cultural images . . . Gramsci's concern with the position of women is related to his reiterated preoccupation with the suppression of women: that they, like peasants and workers, like members of the subaltern groups, they are relegated to a marginal position within the culture and are represented in images of bestiality. The link between women and mass culture also seems not to have escaped his notice. He is particularly perceptive in his recognition of the role of theater and film in positioning women as images and objects of exchange in sexual politics. (Landy 36)

Cinema subverts the ancient cultural traditions which placed women within a respected social niche (see Chapter One), by voyeuristic exposure of the female body within plots depicting women as mindless beings pandering to the whims of a male-dominated society.

Badami locates the young Saroja in 1960s India, but cultural norms are slow to change. Divakaruni situates Anju and Sudha in urban Calcutta of the 1980s, but illustrates the excessive adherence to hegemony within the family's social discourse. Anju protests, "You would think we were living in the Dark Ages instead of in the Eighties"(57). Hegemony in such traditional societies exercises consensual control by linking the social issue of marriages with the importance of a girl's unsullied reputation. Discussing lives of youth and romance in 1990s urban India, the historian and travelogue writer, William Dalrymple remarked:

In the 1990s the subcontinent is the last bastion of the chaperoned virgin, the double-locked bedroom and the arranged marriage. A sex scene in a traditional Indian

film consists of the camera panning away from a converging couple and coming to rest on a bee pollinating a flower, or a violently shaking bush. The result is sexual repression on a massive scale, with hundreds of millions of Indians having no outlet for their erotic tensions. (1998 256)

The subculture created by the effect of cinema and traditional ideologies on romance and ideal love in particular is seen in Divakaruni's skilful handling of the scene in the movie theatre, whereby Sudha and Ashok fall in love merely by looking upon each other for the first time (63-5). The cousins, Sudha and Anju, surreptitiously go to watch a movie, in itself a forbidden act in their family. They further violate family norms by using make-up and leaving their hair unbound. It is against traditional Hindu family rules where "long well-oiled obedient hair symbolizes virtue in women"(100). Sudha then carries her transgressions to the extreme by falling in love with an unknown young man. She falls in love with Ashok at first sight and her feelings are reciprocated. But here the influence of cinema on the subculture can be read as a resistance to the hegemony of patriarchal upper-middle class families which allows the young girls little or no choice in the matter of marriage partners. The enjoyment experienced by Anju and Sudha (two girls from an extremely conservative family) in the forbidden act of watching a film expresses their resistance to a discourse that seeks to control all their actions on the basis of gender and tradition. Cinema here operates as an instrument of resistance. In a sense, in a convention bound society of arranged marriages, cinema appears as a beacon of resistance offering the exciting idea of being able to exercise choice in the matter of seeking a life partner. According to the cultural theorist, Dick Hebdige<sup>36</sup> subcultures often resist the dominant social order in indirect and symbolic ways. But he goes on to state that incorporation of subcultural expression into the dominant social order takes place in certain ways. One of them is through the commodity form which involves the "conversion of subcultural signs (dress, music etc.) into mass-produced objects"(Hebdige 258). Therefore Hindi cinema which commences as a subculture of resistance merges into hegemony as a "creative appropriation of commodities"(McGuigan 97).

Sudha surrenders to the cinematic hegemony in falling in love with Ashok at first sight. Within the Indian cultural discourse, cinema functions as an instrument of both



hegemony and resistance. In a land of arranged marriages, Hindi cinema constantly focuses on love stories. Hebdige asserts: "if a style is to catch on, if it is to become genuinely popular it must say the right thing at the right time"(87). Hindi cinema was and is in the right place at the appropriate time, and it has forever caught the imagination of the Indian audience. Apart from hegemony, romantic fantasy plays a part in igniting Sudha's feelings for Ashok. Sudha is forced to lead a highly restricted life, but she is not totally unaware of life outside the Chatterjee mansion. She notices:

I knew most sixteen-year-old girls in Calcutta didn't live the way we did. I saw them on our way to school . . . And once in a while in the dim alleyways where the flowersellers had their shops, I saw a girl holding hands with a young man, lowering her shy eyes as he pinned a garland to her hair. (57)

So her meeting Ashok coupled with the pressure of the cinematic discourse lead to her capitulation. Cinema plays the dual role of supporting and resisting hegemony. Sudha is unaware of any aspect of Ashok's background when she decides that she loves him. He too, is in the same position regarding her. It is interesting to note that both individuals have just prior to their encounter, watched an extremely romantic Hindi movie laden with melodramatic expressions of love. The film in question clearly appears to be the noted director Kamal Amrohi's 1971 masterpiece *Pakeezah*,<sup>37</sup> a tale of love between a prostitute and a man from a family of high social standing. The course of their love is shown as strewn with obstacles. It would be possible for a young couple with romantic imaginations in that exalted frame of mind, after viewing the film, to imagine themselves as setting out to traverse the same routes as the star-crossed cinematic lovers. Sudha knows that it is not possible for her to marry Ashok easily because her mother would never agree because of Ashok's lower caste status. But the romantic plans made by her and Ashok to elope aided and abetted by the driver, Singhji,<sup>38</sup> have melodramatic and cinematic nuances within them. Guru Dutt's 1955 film, *Mr and Mrs 55* comes to mind in which the heroine Madhubala, playing a rich heiress, is encouraged by her old nanny to defy her wealthy and dictatorial aunt and join her penniless lover. Similarly, the old family butler in Rahul Rawail's film *Betaab* (1983) abets the young heroine Amrita Singh in thwarting rigid patriarchal dictates and fleeing to join her young and virile lover

on his idyllic farmland retreat. A feeling of unreality pervades the entire fictional situation. As in a film, the viewer is aware that there is a touch of unreality to the entire planning and it will probably never materialise. Their romance follows the old romantic tradition of love at first sight and its conclusion seems inevitable -- they succumb to parental dictates and repeat the story of countless Hindi movies. For instance, Yash Chopra's 1975 film, *Kabhie Kabhie*, a great box-office success, tells the tale of the hero Amitabh Bachchan falling in love with Raakhee at first sight and the pair then deciding to separate because Raakhee's parents wish her to marry another man. She does so and makes up her mind to adjust to her marital life. Sudha's decision to go ahead with her marriage to Ramesh again has melodramatic overtones of sacrifice portrayed so often in Hindi cinema.

The elements of fantasy carried over from Sudha's beloved childhood tales are mingled with her burgeoning feelings for Ashok. The world of stories that Sudha and Anju had created for each other shapes most aspects of their adult lives in terms of their dreams and expectations. Sudha's ruminating on the encounter in privacy seems to oscillate between reality and a tale of fantasy:

Lying in bed that night I would marvel at the chance that made Anju choose this very day to persuade me to the cinema, that arranged this young man's seat next to mine in a hall that held so many hundreds. But even then I had known it was no chance but the inexorable force of destiny, hushed and enormous as the wheeling of the planets, which brought us together. And as our glances met, like that of the prince and the princess in the story of the palace of snakes, the final word the Bidhata Purush<sup>39</sup> had written for me blazed on my forehead. But this we had no eyes to see.

They say in the old tales that when a man and woman exchange looks in the way we did, their spirits mingle. Their gaze is a rope of gold binding each to the other. (65)

The author appears to present an almost cinematic style of romantic encounter, namely, boy meets girl, their eyes lock across a room and love blooms. It is melodrama that is being staged and Divakaruni explores this cultural facet through her fiction. As Mishra asserts: "Bombay cinema represents cultural truths of ... truths that bind eternal laws

together—not truths of a representational (lifelike) kind”(39). Such ‘metatextual’ truths appear to weave their way into the lives of the protagonists. Sudha and Ashok seem to fulfil the decree of timeless cultural laws when they gaze at each other and fall in love. It could be the coming to life of many Indian love poems, romances and indeed innumerable Hindi film screenplays themselves.

In his study, *Is There a Text in this Class?: The Authority of Interpretive Communities*, the literary theorist Stanley Fish discusses the idea that literature is an “open category”(11) defined by what the reader decides to put in it. So the reader “makes” literature; but he is not a free and subjective agent in this activity, he is a member of an interpretive community, “. . . whose assumptions about literature determine the kind of attention he pays” (ibid) and his manner of interpretation. Applying Fish’s concepts to different sections of cinema audiences, it is possible to obtain different interpretive communities based on varying factors of age, sex, education, socio-economic strata and so on.

With regard to the narratives, the interpretive community may be divided into the young and the old. The older generation disapproves of and fears the subversive power of the cinematic discourse (except mythologicals)<sup>40</sup> and the younger protagonists seek out the hidden thrill of the melodramatic discourse. The older generation appears hypocritical, especially followers of patriarchy, such as Nalini, who allow daughters to watch sentimental dramas based on pure hegemony because she herself enjoys them (Divakaruni 61). When it comes to a question of her daughter’s enjoyment conservative dogmas are strictly enforced.

The effects of media on youth subculture have been analysed by the cultural theorist Angela McRobbie. In her essay “*Jackie*<sup>41</sup> Magazine: Romantic Individualism and the Teenage Girl”, McRobbie describes the effect of the magazine of the same name on selected youth population of the working classes in certain areas of England.<sup>42</sup> The magazine had a deep impact on youth subculture within the group being studied. McRobbie asserts that *Jackie* and other such magazines have an intense impact,

particularly, on the psychological make-up of female youth convincing them of the essentially subordinate nature of femininity which is to be lived within sharply delineated and pre-determined roles. The similarities inherent within the hegemonic ideologies propagated by *Jackie* and Hindi commercial cinema are clear. McRobbie claims: “Dealing with the family, the discussion is couched in the language of sentiment and the girl in question is made to feel guilty.” . . . “The message here is clear; like the family the law must be obeyed”(112-3).

Divakaruni appears to be hinting at the notions of love and romance peculiar to the Hindi movie industry and constantly propagated in film after film. Hindi cinema usually advances the ideal of love at first sight and recognition of a soul-mate at first glance. The movie they are viewing appears to chart the course Sudha and Ashok will travel as lovers. Separation appears imminent with the hope of reunion (in the film, the younger generation of lovers are united in the end). As McRobbie explains: “Underpinning all the adventures and historical tableaux is romance, the young girl in pursuit of it, or being pursued by it. Love, it is claimed, transcends time and is all-important, and history is, again, denied” (104). This denial of socio-cultural reality is seen in films such as *Sapney*<sup>43</sup> (1998), wherein an educated, wealthy young girl Kajol, falls in love with an uneducated barber, spurning the advances of an educated well to do and highly sensitive and loving young man from her own ilk. Social equilibrium is disturbed as cinema churns out contradictory messages, on one hand reiterating allegiance to family and law and on the other hand building a subculture resistant to the dominant discourse. It may also be interpreted as a message of aspiration for the lower classes and a threatening message for the upper and middle classes hinting at the disintegration of the social and caste order. This implied threat may lead to a rush to establish further hegemonic control points. These conflicting battles of ideology do not benefit the confused Indian youth; but it is a bewildering ideological morass which is effective because it has made its entry into a society which is tradition bound and yet experiencing constant flux due to globalisation.

The factor of the author resisting the dominant romantic discourse comes into play as Divakaruni delivers a final twist letting Sudha’s desire for independence and love for her

daughter and Anju take precedence over her feelings for Ashok. Unlike typical heroines of Hindi cinema who need men as bulwarks, the author creates a heroine who walks away to stand on her own and seeks the aid of her sister rather than a male lover. Divakaruni appears to be stressing the folly of being seduced by cinematic ideals. When Ashok hesitates over accepting baby Dayita (277-8), the almost perfect lover (he had waited long and faithfully for Sudha), is shown to fall far short of the ideal. What triumphs is the deep bond between the sisters, regardless of the complicated relationships with the men in their lives. The fictional discourse reads as a resistance to the male dominated cinematic ideologies of romance. Analysing the contents of the *Jackie* magazine, McRobbie comments that none of the short stories in the magazine end in showing the triumph of female friendship: “No story ever ends with two girls alone together and enjoying each other’s company”(101). It is a situation reminiscent of the superficial and sycophantic female friendships illustrated within hegemonic Indian cinematic discourse. Divakaruni’s novel, by contrast, explores possibilities of intensely committed female relationships as a protection against hegemonic oppression.

The romantic relationship between the youthful Sumi and Gopal in Shashi Deshpande’s *A Matter of Time* contains no elements of cinematic fantasy. It is a friendship that develops into romantic love between two people who treat each other as equals. It could be read as the modern woman’s fantasy of a strong egalitarian marital relationship unfettered by hegemony. Fantasy, the ‘stuff that dreams are made of,’ is the bridge between desire and reality, spanning the chasm between what is asked for and what is granted (Kakar 1996 25). But with Gopal’s desertion of Sumi, the ephemeral nature of man-woman love again comes to the fore. Sumi could be taken to portray the modern girl’s fantasy of the strong, graceful and educated Indian woman; but it also is a fantasy that shatters as the reader grapples with the authorial interpretation of the harsh realities of the solitariness of the individual situation: “For Sumi, the feeling of being abandoned remains, the knowledge that came to her in Ramesh’s house that night, though she had not recognised it, then--- ‘we are, all of us, always strangers to one another’—becomes part of her”(180).

Mishra states that Hindi commercial cinema stresses what he terms the “dharmik values”(5). They are elements of the cultural past that have survived and are reinterpreted into the present in a hegemonic manner. They are mainly dictates of the legendary law-giver Manu, whose patriarchal dogmas serve contemporary vested interests (Basham 1967 113). According to A.L. Basham, in ancient India though ‘dharma’ could literally be interpreted as the righteous path, it had different aspects to it. Speaking of those times, Basham writes:

There is indeed a common dharma, a general norm of conduct which all must follow equally, but there is also a dharma appropriate to each class and to each stage in the life of the individual. The dharma of men of high birth is not that of humbler folk, . . .

This thoroughgoing recognition that men are not the same, and that there is a hierarchy of classes, each with its separate duties and distinctive way of life, is one of the most striking features of Indian sociology. (1967 38)

The overwhelming influence of this hegemonic tradition combined with a general ignorance of the finer intellectual and ethical issues debated in the Hindu scriptures have led to the creation of social order based on cinematic values rooted in the shackling norms of the patriarchal order. Mishra’s following analyses is highly relevant in light of the above statement:

A transcendental principle of dharma (the ultimate Hindu law), a decentred notion of genre, and a mode of heterogeneous manufacture combine to create the sentimental melodramatic romance that is Bombay Cinema. The flexibility of the genre makes for the notion of dharma to be transgressed in a regulated manner, as irruptions in the text, as presentiments of alternative (and even superior) critiques, rather than as the construction of a radically new world order. Suggestively, Bombay Cinema interprets to the point of change but never changes the ethical order itself. (14)

The folkloric element in Indian cinema comes into play with constant references to the ancient myths, legends and epics, which even today are living presences within the psyche of most Indians, urban or rural. The dangerous aspect to this socio-cultural tradition is that folkloric elements are often depicted by the hegemonic discourse as

“common sense”. The risks inherent in accepting “common sense” as an instrument of social betterment have been pointed out by Gramsci, who defines “common sense . . . as containing fragmentary ideas, a collage of opinions and beliefs that fails to be not only coherent but also critical”(Landy 29). This ideal of “common sense” is what motivates Nalini’s maternal advice to Sudha that she should sexually manipulate her husband to control him (Divakaruni 284); yet Nalini is the same mother who advocated excessive control on movements of unmarried girls. Nalini had stifled her niece Anju’s protests by stating : “Why can’t you be quiet and let your elders who know more of the world than you, make the important decisions?” (57). The logic of Anju’s retort that they would know more if they were not so restricted by conservative traditions is ignored.

Mishra’s ideas on the subtle yet coercive persuasion wielded by the dominant ideology driving commercial Indian cinema and its effect on mass culture are supported by Gramscian theories on the effect of media when elements of folklore are taken as signifying common sense. As Landy explains:

Folklore is not completely mindless nor is it completely negative. It could be said that it is the way that subaltern groups learn to rationalize and survive under conditions of hardship. Folklore is not self-conscious and critical, however, and without self-consciousness and criticism change is difficult if not impossible. (29)

The Indian film-makers encourage such an ideology and ‘dharmik values’ are imposed continually and blatantly on the masses in film after film. But the masses are not mindless automata. They are often willing participants in the process of creating and fulfilling suppressed fantasies, using the crutch offered by folklore in the guise of common sense. Kakar’s theories validate this:

Like the adult daydream, Hindi film emphasizes the central features of fantasy—the fulfilment of wishes, the humbling of competitors and the destruction of enemies. The stereotyped twists and turns of the film plot ensure the repetition of the very message that makes, for instance, the fairytale so deeply satisfying to children---namely, that the struggle against difficulties in life is unavoidable, but if one faces life’s hardships and its many, often unjust impositions with courage and steadfastness, one will eventually emerge victorious. (1996 27)

Regarding the influence of the ideal socio-cultural order as stressed in the Indian epics and their pervasive influence on Indian society and Indian commercial cinema in particular, Mishra refers to the views of the noted Bengali film critic Chidananda Das Gupta. “ ‘The epics and myths of the country,’ wrote Chidananda Das Gupta, ‘would seem to present the most widely acceptable base for the artistic development of the Indian cinema.’ ”(Chakravarty 1993 in Mishra 2002).<sup>44</sup> Dasgupta’s view is further supported by Kakar:

There are tales told by the folk and the myths narrated by family elders and religious story-tellers, or enacted by actors and dancers . . . Today, in addition, we also have popular movies as well as modern novels and plays, which combine the society’s traditional preoccupations with more contemporary promptings. (1996 7)

These factors display vivid features of the Gramscian theory of consensual control. Patriarchal hegemony holds complete sway. The use of the mythological cultural tradition is expertly exploited by commercial film makers to tighten the shackles of patriarchy on Indian socio-cultural norms. The vast Indian middle class, approximately four hundred million in size, does not take any active steps to loosen the stranglehold in spite of being notionally “educated” and “aware”.

There exists a handful of people creating what are titled ‘Art’ films containing themes veering away from the beaten track. But such films are never viable in financial terms nor do they manage to produce a tremendous impact, as their creators are always imposing constraints on the extent to which new ideas may be incorporated. The film critic Shoma A. Chatterji commenting on the reasons for the shortcomings of the products of Indian art film makers claims:

Sadly, a few serious Indian film-makers have fallen into this trap of ‘selling’ the Western audience the ‘culture’ they want to see in an Indian film, resulting in films that are aesthetically beautiful and technically perfect but which appear like concoctions of so-called Indian culture artificially imposed from the top. These films...are like beautifully decorated mannequins in garment show-windows — they lack life, soul and heart.<sup>45</sup> (Chatterji, Shoma 356)



A film avoiding this trap is Mira Nair's *Monsoon Wedding* (2001). Nair's depiction of the few days leading up to the celebration of an arranged marriage in a Hindu Punjabi family of Delhi is a powerful study of the intricacies governing upper-middle class, urban Indian family life, relationships and the many issues such as sexual abuse within family which are preferably not mentioned as they are factors disrupting the very structured patterns of Indian family systems and the prevalent discourses. Most importantly, Nair has depicted the positive aspect of Indian arranged marriages. The older generation of the Verma family have all had arranged marriages and as shown in the film there exists great fondness and a feeling of camaraderie and companionship between most of the older married couples. Also the young couple (Aditi and Hemant) whose marriage has been arranged manage to arrive at a good understanding and camaraderie in spite of Hemant's initial anger upon learning that Aditi had embarked upon an engagement with him despite her involvement with a married man. Aditi's ability to disclose to Hemant her relationship with her boyfriend and her subsequent disillusionment and termination of the affair, coupled with Hemant's understanding and their decision to proceed with the marriage with a positive approach reflects major shifts within the socio-cultural discourse within cinema, itself a reflection of the changes within certain sections of society in urban India. This is a shift away from traditional 'Art' cinema. Commenting on the deconstructivist nature of such cinema, which he terms 'Indian "middle (brow) cinema"', Mishra states that "as always, deconstructive moments are continually being reincorporated back into this massive grand syntagm, back into Bombay Cinema as generic form"(15), an evaluation precisely echoing Hebdige's theories of the "incorporation" of sub-cultures.

With reference to the 'dharmik value- systems', Hindi commercial cinema reiterates the importance of the extended family in many films made under the category of 'socials' or family dramas'. Such films also stress the need for constant observance of filial duty and subservience to parental dictates. Parents are usually depicted as paragons of virtue, even if they seem to deviate from the norm.

Storylines remain anchored to the centralised figure of the mother. She is usually created as a one-dimensional character of extreme goodness with almost superhuman powers of endurance. The mother figure within the cinematic discourse is 'matriducal'; the maternal figurehead within a patriarchal conservative often puritanical society. In a film industry where the majority of movies are male-centred, the dominance of the mother often outstrips that of the female love-interest. Mishra refers to the films of the Indian mega-star Amitabh Bachchan and the fact that in most of Bachchan's films, the relationship between the hero and the mother-figure carries far greater intensity than the relationship shared between the hero and the woman who played his lover. Mishra analyses Bachchan's 1974-5 hit film *Deewar*, where the main protagonists are the two sons and their mother and goes on to investigate the matriducal role of the mother in a movie where the entire cinematic focus centres around the persona of Amitabh Bachchan. He claims:

Although the mother (and woman generally) is removed from the discourse of Bachchan,<sup>46</sup> her power remains even as that of woman-as-lover diminishes . . . Motherhood remains something rather special in Bombay cinema, and even Bachchan's wry cynicism cannot remove her from her central position in Indian culture. (150)

This phenomenon is very much in keeping with the narrow cinematic interpretation of the family structure by traditionalists. In the social control exercised by the patriarchal hegemony through the cinematic discourse, the man-woman relationship is relegated to the lowest rung of importance in the familial hierarchy. Hindi cinema tends to portray woman as stereotypes. They convey a social message outlining specific emotional and psychological profiles within which women are supposed to fit. In her essay on Indian women and cinema, the journalist Maithili Rao writes:

The Cinema frame may be rectangular but the Indian woman is imprisoned in a triangle. She is torn between a trinity of role models---the mythical archetype (readily invoked but seldom realised), the autonomous individual (rare in commercial cinema) and the stereotype (all too common). The triangle also symbolises the pyramid of the patriarchal ideology so diligently disseminated by purveyors of popular culture. Here, women form the emotional base for the hero perched at the pinnacle. And on the rare occasion when she is enthroned at the pinnacle,

the emotional base is shaky and the whole structure of inverted patriarchy threatens to collapse.

To phrase this eternal dilemma differently, the screen image reflects our cultural schizophrenia when it concerns the portrayal of women. The popular mode oscillates between two extremes: the deified Devi to whom one must offer obligatory genuflection or the mindless sex object to titillate the mass male gaze. The latter is even more revealing of our collective neurosis. She is the desired sex object with no desire of her own. Her sexuality and selfhood are denied and she is often made to internalise her own sex object status. This in short, sums up the mode of popular discourse.<sup>47</sup> (Rao 1995 342)

Rao's analysis of the cinematic ideology regarding women reflects the adoption of the negative aspects of traditional Hindu culture. Basham remarks that "the ancient Indian attitude to women was in fact ambivalent. She was at once a goddess and a slave, a saint and a strumpet"(1967 183).

In her analysis of the impact made by *Jackie*, McRobbie discusses the 'culture of femininity'(93) which has saturated the lives of women, influencing their codes of behaviour: "As part of the dominant ideology it has saturated their lives, colouring the way they dress, the way they act and the way they talk to each other. This ideology is predicated upon their future roles as wives and mothers"(ibid). Nalini's rearing of her daughter and the codes of behaviour she prescribes for Anju and Sudha prior to their marriage show the stranglehold of similar hegemonic ideologies dictating the positioning of women within the social system. Anju describes:

Aunt's created an entire regimen for us. Each morning we start by eating almonds which have been soaked overnight in milk. This, Aunt has declared, will cool our systems, calm our minds, and improve both our dispositions and our complexions. Then we have to do half an hour of yoga and callisthenics, to give us endurance, which we are sure to need as wives, and to prevent the sagging of our various body parts, which might be offensive to our future husbands. Then we might apply turmeric paste to our faces—more complexion improvement—and to keep the pungent, itchy mask on for half an hour while Ramur Ma rubs warm coconut oil into our hair. (Divakaruni 100)

Upon Devi's return from America (*The Thousand Faces of Night*), Sita also conducts her daughter's life on slightly more sophisticated but similar patterns. Saroja is constantly in trouble with her mother as she resists the dictates of such norms by use of a caustic tongue: " 'I see the prospect of marriage hasn't smoothed that knife in your mouth. Is that how you will talk to your husband?' Amma never lets me forget that my tongue has got me into trouble more than once"(Badami 176). Sumi again emerges as different from the rest as the silence which her mother imposed upon her (Deshpande 73-4) keeping in line with patriarchy is not one she has passed on to her daughters. They have been left free to develop as individuals. The influence of the cinematic cultural traditions hardly appears to have a place in the lives of Sumi and her daughters.

Marcia Landy, discussing Gramscian theories, writes that within the Fascist ideology:

The woman was seen as the guardian of the family, the nurturer of the man, and the breeder of children. Gramsci's comments on sexual difference as an ideological construction in need of demystification are aimed at combating conditions that go beyond Fascism and touch the very basis of organized social relations. Even in his discussions of various forms of artistic representation, he identifies the ways in which these attitudes are present in literature, theatre and the silent cinema. (37)

This concept of 'woman as the guardian of the family' again accords the woman a matriducal status.

Landy's statements can also be applied in describing the ideology followed by the vast majority of producers of Indian commercial cinema. Discussing Gramscian ideas on popular culture, Strinati stresses the importance of producers versus consumers in the creation of such culture (217). In contemporary India, the art of filmmaking has passed from the hands of an educated and cultured upper middle-class mostly into the grasp of a *nouveau riche* group for whom such commercial films are a means to amass further quick wealth or constitute a conversion zone for illegal money into legitimate wealth. For such categories of filmmakers, the audience is not usually of prime consideration. They churn out films with stock formulas regardless of the standard of cinematic art. Mishra discusses this new breed of film makers and the latest trends of film craft in his study:

Often the script is a loose idea that grows as the film is manufactured

in parts ----prerecorded songs and music, shootings undertaken in a haphazard fashion, concessions made to financiers who may well be (as the evidence increasingly suggests) powerful Bombay underworld figures such as Nazim Hassan Rizvi and Dawood Ibrahim . . . The end product thus carries the marks of its mode of production as well as the ideology of its financiers. (14)

An interesting feature of most upper middle and middle class urban Indian homes is that commercial Hindi cinema and most people associated with the dealings of the film industry are considered disreputable to some extent and are not accorded high social status. The film industry is perceived as a domain of nefarious activities and questionable morality. But unlike the maternal figures in Divakaruni's novel, such educated upper-middle class families rarely set a complete ban on their daughters' viewing films. With the coming of satellite television and other technological innovations, it would be a futile endeavour.

Although the author does not specifically try to place the work within that period, Divakaruni's novel appears to locate itself in the Indian socio-cultural milieu of at least a quarter of a century ago which may be a consequence of the inbuilt obsolescence of the expatriate view. But the novel is located in the 1980s and the socio-cultural trends are made to appear more rigid than they were at the time. But the author herself shows the fallacy of the protagonists in their refusal to accept the influences of changing times. The older female protagonists feel the impact of the changing times with having to face harsh realities like Sudha's divorce, single motherhood and Sudha's decision to move to America with Anju. Ultimately the ivory tower existence of the Chatterjees collapses to form a new order of sisterhood: "Two women who have travelled the vale of sorrow, and the baby who will save them, who has saved them already. Madonnas with child" (Divakaruni 340). While Divakaruni locates her 1999 novel within an earlier and more rigid socio-cultural ethos, the underlying ideology does not vary greatly in upper middle and middle class Indian homes. The shackles of parental authority have relaxed to some extent with the times. Hindi cinema was and is considered to display a culture not suitable for the youth from decent homes. Bombay cinema is a symbol of popular or mass culture, which in itself is considered very low-brow by the urban Indian middle and upper

middle classes. They are not unique in this. McRobbie in her study on romantic individualism and the teenage girl, with regard to popular culture comments: “Mass culture is seen as a manipulative, vulgar, profit-seeking industry offering cheap and inferior versions of the arts to the more impressionable and vulnerable sectors of the population”(85).

Sudha and Anju (*Sister of My Heart*) are from a highly traditional family with a conservative outlook; therefore their escapade results in them having to face excessive maternal disapproval.

Here they are, says Aunt N. Look at them sauntering in, hand in hand, the shameless hussies. Do they care that all of Calcutta is talking about their escapade? Of course not. Do they care that they have smeared the blackest kali<sup>48</sup> on our faces? (70)

But the ultimate consequence of the girls’ marriages being arranged ostensibly due to this transgression again appears too cinematic and drastic a step, even keeping in mind the idea of fictional reality. The mothers symbolise the face of extreme conservatism that a particular interpretive community within the audience may share.

Sudha’s consequent decision to elope with Ashok, her faithful lover, also carries nuances of successful Hindi films. A stereotypical scenario of many such movies goes thus: Boy and Girl love each other, they face parental opposition of an unreasonable kind and determined to overcome all odds, decide to elope with each other to some suitably deserted spot in over-populated India. For instance, the 1988 super hit film *Qayamat Se Qayamat Tak* (a modern version of Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet*) shows the hero and heroine eloping to a remote hilly area once they come across obstacles to their romance. Similarly, the romantic duo in another hit movie, *Dil* (1990) follow the same track in their battle against parental tyranny and opposition. Conventional patterns of melodrama dominate the structuring of these films in order to guarantee for the audiences “the easy pleasures of vicarious triumph” (Smith 15). Smith explains further:

Take an innocent man and a defenceless woman, both of them wholly admirable and free from fault. Present them sympathetically. . . set them against every obstacle you

can devise. . . Dramatize these excitements, . . . heighten the suspense with music, relieve it with laughter and tears. . . when all seems lost, allow your hero and heroine to win. . . Let villainy be outwitted. . . virtue finally rewarded with infinite joy. . . This is the pattern of the melodrama of triumph. (ibid)

In Hindi films, parental unreasonableness is carried to the extreme and the young couple are perceived as lacking the intelligence and ability to proclaim their independence except by means of outright rebellion. No movie ever puts forward the idea of ignoring parental attempts at authoritarian control, or using their qualifications and education as a means of establishing themselves as an independent unit. What is propagated is the idea of the 'arranged love marriage' (86) as Mishra calls it, a marriage with a partner of one's own choice, meeting with unconditional parental approval. This cinematic discourse is mirrored to a certain inverted manner in the new socio-cultural patterns developing within the urban Indian arranged marriage system. While studying Indian arranged marriages of the 1990s, Bumiller notes:

the "new" Indian arranged marriage is something of a breakthrough after all. The middle class has essentially created an odd hybrid by grafting the Western ideal of romantic love onto the traditions of Hindu society—yet another example, perhaps, of the Indian talent for assimilating the culture of a foreign invader. . . . In the end, the result is something completely and peculiarly Indian, including the notion that it "works." (42)

Female protagonists such as Divakaruni's Sudha and Anju and Hariharan's Devi, carry within themselves the psychological and emotional traits of urban Indian girls reared within a specific cultural discourse. From childhood such girls are moulded within the confines of traditional mores framed by the patriarchal discourse dominant within almost all Indian families. The authors locate the protagonists within specifically created family backgrounds which reveal the ideological investments and imbibed cultural influences shaping the former's thoughts and actions.

Though Sudha has strictly been kept from viewing commercial Hindi cinema, she, like Hariharan's young female protagonist, Devi, has not been bereft of contact with the world of romance and fantasy. The constant telling and retelling of ancient Hindu myths

and legends, folk narratives, and historical tales of chivalry, many recounting exploits of heroic handsome and princely warriors and beautiful young women falling in love at first sight, leave their mark on the psyche of the young girls. Devi says, “I dream often of a god-like hero who flew effortlessly across the night sky, and guided me gently when he saw my own desperate desire to fly with him”(Hariharan 46). The literary critics, Atrey and Kirpal state that “the socialization of the girl child takes place through various means. Folklore, rituals, prescriptive conduct codes and restrictions are repeated continuously to her throughout her growing years”(17). The older women, in the form of Abha Pishi (*Sister of My Heart*) and Devi’s grandmother (*The Thousand Faces of Night*), are the narrators of such tales and the story-telling traditions continue over the generations and these stories are a permanent and typical feature of the Indian family life. Devi’s memories of childhood visits to her grandmother’s village home are intertwined with those of her grandmother’s never-ending heroic narratives:

And most of all, in my memories of those summers, my grandmother’s house is crowded with superhuman warriors, men and women destined to lead heroic lives. For many summers, I thrived on a diet of her caressing gnarled fingers and her stories of golden splendour.

Listen, my child, she would begin, her hand unravelling the stray knots in my wet hair, listen to these stories of men and women who loved, shed blood, and met their deaths as ardently as they lived. (27)

Anju (*Sister of My Heart*) as a child scoffs at the romantic myths and folktales, but the fact that she too has not escaped their pervasive influence is seen in her ability to immediately endow Sunil with various appealing qualities at their very first encounter, and from then on totally alter her antagonistic stance to the idea of an arranged marriage. By merely asking her for Virginia Woolf’s novels and misleading her by saying that Woolf is his favourite author, Sunil manages to convince Anju that he is the perfect future husband. Anju’s reactions are those of delight at his approach. Her ultra-conservative upbringing leaves her in ignorance of its practised tone:

‘I know your name, Miss Anjali,’ he says, ‘Don’t you want to know mine?’  
I stare at him. A suspicion makes my heart leap. But surely not, I couldn’t be that lucky.  
‘It’s Sunil. Yes, Mr. America himself! . . . ’ (129)



Devi (*The Thousand Faces of Night*) appears to expect to fulfil dreams of romance within an arranged marriage. She is doomed to disappointment. Devi internalises her dilemma over Mahesh:

A marriage cannot be forced into suddenly being there, it must grow naturally, like a delicate but promising sapling. What about us? What kind of a life will we make together? It seems too foolish, too intense a question to ask of this reasonable stranger who has already carefully examined, experienced, dissected, and is now ready to file away as settled, something as fragile and newborn as our marriage. (Hariharan 49)

Mahesh's pragmatic and often callous approach to marriage and romance deny the fulfilment of her fantasy, upon which she, in a familiar cinematic pattern, elopes with her musician lover, Gopal. The singer and artist is always considered a person of sensitivity and refinement and is sketched through the medium of Hindi commercial cinema as an absent-minded dreamer attuned to all the deepest emotional needs of others, especially unhappy or romantic young women. Gopal does not in any way live up to the fantasy ideal of the artist lover and Devi's summing up of his traits as a lover before she leaves him is explicitly ruthless: " 'Gopal was the sort', Devi thought, 'who should make love in a room lined with mirrors. He could then lose himself in the perfect pitch of rapture that delicately flooded his face' "(135). Within the Indian cinematic and cultural discourse, great sensitivity is attributed to the usually impecunious artist contrasting vividly with the portrayal of a businessman or a professional in usually ruthless mould. For instance, Shakti Samanta's 1970 film *Safar* shows the young heroine (herself a medical student) in love with a young and impoverished artist. Rajesh Khanna, the early seventies megastar, played the artist lover; while Feroze Khan, a lesser known actor, portrayed the businessman husband of Sharmila Tagore. The husband commits suicide upon realising that his wife will always love the artist who is also terminally ill with cancer. The entire movie revolves on a highly sympathetic depiction of the artist and his lady love. The script is not very favourable to the long-suffering husband racked by emotional pain and jealousy.

Such pervasive cultural patterns appear to generate a form of consensual control over the recipients of the ideologies. Without exhibiting overt signs of conscious realisation, the protagonists appear to have inculcated within their psyches, stereotypical cultural patterns regarding love, romance and marriage. Angela McRobbie claims, for the youthful readers of *Jackie*, this form of ideology begins to be incorporated within the motions of daily living. In her essay titled “The Politics of Feminist Research: Between Talk, Text and Action”,<sup>49</sup> McRobbie explains that her work on female youth and culture was inspired by her “concern with the way girls experienced all the pressures imposed on them to aspire to a model of femininity and how they lived this ideology on a day to day basis”(63). Like McRobbie, the cultural theorist Janice Radway describes the media as a powerful ideological force (1999 395). Radway claims that the fantasy of romance is: “closely connected with social and material conditions of women’s lives”(ibid 398). Applying Radway’s idea to the cinematic discourse in India, one may observe a need within the urban middle-class audience for possibilities of romance beyond the dictates of socio-cultural hegemony. This need is fulfilled by the viewing of cinema as it stems from the conditions of the people’s lives. The fictional discourse also encompasses aspects of this theory as it is seen that the socio-cultural situations within which they exist leave women such as Anju, Sudha (*Sister of My Heart*), Devi (*The Thousand Faces of Night*), vulnerable to exploitation in different ways when the initial approach comes as an appeal to their romantic fantasies.

Badami in her novel *Tamarind Mem* portrays an instance of the contemptuous attitude of the educated urban Indian to the world of popular culture in the form of cinema and the film actors themselves. The new face of India, the inter-mingling of politics and cinema, is an aspect explored through Badami’s writing. Saroja’s comments on the chief minister of a southern Indian state, an ex-filmstar turned politician, whom she mocks and ridicules, reveal the approach of the qualified urbanite Indian to the film industry. It is an obvious satire on the late actor turned politician, M.G. Ramachandran,<sup>50</sup> who was the chief minister of the State of Tamilnadu for a long period. Saroja is equally scathing of her maid’s admiration of the actor-politician:

As a matter of fact, I have never even seen the chief minister’s face. He wears

large goggles and a furry cap, both of which hide his face almost entirely . . . He used to be a film star long ago, and the residue of that life is evident in the way he conducts his manoeuvres . . . The man makes flamboyant speeches, soliloquies almost, wears glittering clothes and addresses all women as “mother” or “sister.” . . . Younger women, like my maid Puttamma, adore him for his swaggering walk, his succulent lips, the eyes enigmatically hidden behind his dark glasses. (259)

Yet Saroja cannot escape the discourse altogether. She belongs to an interpretive audience community who is contemptuous of cinematic hegemony and yet cannot escape having a sense of curiosity about it. In spite of her professed dislike of the politician, she appears fully conversant with all the gossip relating to the chief minister. The dominant discourse is always invasive by nature. Saroja’s contempt for the Chief Minister can be further understood in the light of Landy’s comments on Gramscian theory with regard to traditional intellectuals:

“Low” or mass culture is viewed as escapist and diversionary, lacking in moral qualities and seriousness of purpose; “high” culture is uncorrupted by the “marketplace,” . . . The bias against mass or popular culture further reinforces the separation between the “ignorant masses” and the educated elite. While Gramsci was not an advocate of mass culture, his work reveals that political and cultural analysis must incorporate a broad awareness of cultural production. (37)

The above-mentioned socio-cultural discourse is further explained by Gramsci’s theory that “. . . in reality the elaboration of intellectual groups does not take place on an abstract democratic basis, but according to very concrete traditional historical processes” (1968 123).

Saroja’s opinions of those who form part of the world of popular culture are signs of a denigration of popular culture by certain educated, urbanised sectors of society, especially in countries such as India. Discussing ‘mass culture’ and distinguishing it from ‘academic culture’, the critic Judith Williamson claims:

the referent of the term “mass culture” is not the artifacts themselves, the TV programs and so on, but the people who watch them, “the masses”: people who must, to us in the academic world, appear as the “other” or we would not have

an object of study but a *subject* of study---ourselves.<sup>51</sup> (Williamson 100)

What can be observed from the author's depiction of the issue is that the actor-politician appeals to the maidservant, who belongs to the lower socio-economic strata of society, but not to Saroja who forms a part of upper middle-class India with its elitist approaches. She is also a Brahmin by caste and exhibits further the supercilious attitude of her group in her ridicule of something so intrinsically a part of the mass culture as a politician from the lower castes who was once an actor. An Indian reader, who is a participant-observer<sup>52</sup> (see Chapter Three) will easily understand the occasional stigma attached to such groups of politicians and film actors. But it would be incorrect to view popular Indian cinema with all its associations as a symbol or battlefield for the class struggle within Indian society. Given the proliferation of mass culture within Indian society, the urban middle class Indians such as Saroja could be taken as constructing a subculture of their own; a subculture which allows them to participate in mass culture, but with a strongly critical and judgmental perspective. But hegemony does not completely relax its hold on such an audience community.

Reverting to hegemonic portrayals of socio-cultural discourses in Indian cinema, it is again worthwhile examining McRobbie's ideas on the media impact on ideologies of romance. McRobbie emphasises certain vital aspects of the concept of romance in the magazine stories. She stresses that it is always a union between the opposite sexes and further claims: "romance is about the public and social effects and implications of love relationships"(101). According to her, romance as propagated by popular culture is portrayed as: "the language of passivity." McRobbie's analysis of the culture presented through the magazine is clear: authority lies with the family and with the law and both have to be obeyed (106). With regard to the stories on romance in the magazines, McRobbie asserts: "the same themes appear and reappear with monotonous regularity . . . "(117). A similar pattern is observed within the discourse of commercial cinema which for decades has been revamping the same storylines in new guises.

As discussed earlier, Bombay cinema rarely deviates from stereotypical patterns. Any changes will usually be superficial owing to the advent of time or surface alteration of the

milieu. The cultural patterns persistently display certain hegemonic factors. For instance, these patterns are almost circular, continually reverting to particular ideas deeply embedded in the socio-cultural discourse within which Indian commercial cinema functions. This discourse stresses the supremacy of the male, his macho abilities and the women's absolute dependence on the men in their lives. Also repeatedly observed is the dominance of the family elders in the lives of the younger generation. The feature of Hindi cinema which is most humiliating to women is the constant stress on the utter impurity of a woman who has been raped and also a woman who may have fallen pregnant unwittingly either to a lover or as a result of rape. The screenplays make it clear that her choices are very limited; she may either kill herself or be saved by the love of a good man. Very rarely are the heroes portrayed as ordinary mortals. They are always larger-than-life creations possessed of unimaginable strength of body and mind and imbued with every virtue known to mankind. Such hegemonic factors remain owing to the consensual control they exercise on the vast majority of Indian population. Even the educated Indian urbanites who condemn Hindi cinema in course of conversation, will admit that they and their families constantly view such cinema. The hegemony of the system is imbibed daily almost like the air one breathes. Maithili Rao provides an explanation for this phenomenon:

The predictable coincidences proliferating in our formulaic films buffer us against the uncertainties of life. They act as a kind of safety valve for an ancient civilization hurtled into modernity and nation-statehood without the benefit of an evolutionary historical process.<sup>53</sup> (Rao 2001 146)

As film upon film is released, it is very apparent that the traditional format of Hindi cinema and regional commercial Indian cinema is not easily going to alter, because audience approval of certain themes has been constant. None concerned, not even the new breed of money-laundering film makers, would like to risk their wealth on unsure grounds and opt for excessive experimentation in a society riddled with the shackles of traditional ideas and the hegemony of the patriarchal discourse.

Raj Khosla directed *Do Raaste* in 1969 and *Om Jai Jagdish* in 2001. In spite of the intervening decades, the similarities are obvious in the constant emphasis on the importance of unity within the extended family and indifference to and discouragement of individualism. The woman is very often the villain in such family tales, usually as one of the daughters-in-law, who seeks to set up an independent nuclear unit with her own husband and children. This behaviour is accorded the status of a semi-criminal act in commercial Hindi cinema and portrayed as a most unnatural desire on the part of the woman, explained usually as the result of a bad upbringing. The mother of Bindu (the errant daughter-in-law) in *Do Raaste* and the family of the rich daughter-in-law Urmila Matondkar, in *Om Jai Jagdish*, are depicted as having raised daughters against cultural dictates, a situation which needs remedying by bringing the younger women to a realisation of their follies and asserting yet again the need of family solidarity. Bumiller states: "In middle-class India, where the family is still more important than any of its individual members, love is believed to flow out of social arrangements and is actually subservient to them" (31).

For instance, the 1974 film *Bidaai* portrays Leena Chandvarkar as the spoilt only daughter of a rich man who because of her background and indulgent upbringing is unable to stay in an extended family situation and abandons her widowed mother-in-law; who in the usual style of Hindi cinema is portrayed as a cross between a saint and a martyr. The heroine is made to realise her folly by her husband who kidnaps her new born baby son to bring her to realisation of the pain she has caused mother and son by separating them. In this ludicrous plot, the writers or filmmakers never query how parents of married daughters should deal with the pain of separation from their offspring. The hegemonic factors being stressed are the deep bonding between mother and sons as well as the disruption caused by the inclusion of an outsider into the family, namely the daughter-in-law. Bumiller states: "Mama's boys and the Oedipus complex are not unique to India, but the intensity and pervasiveness of the cycle may be"(40). The feeling of the daughter-in-law posing a disruptive threat to the family structure also stems from the identification of the daughter-in-law solely as woman and therefore possessing sexuality:

“It is only just as a woman, as a female sexual being, that the patriarchal culture’s horror and scorn are heaped upon the helpless wife”(Kakar 1996 19).

Women who usually portray vamps or molls in most films are usually cast in such roles; thereby creating a bias on the part of the audience from the start. It creates a sense of comfort too, a positioning of the actors and the images in the minds of the audience upon commencement of the film. The audience in a way knows what to expect. For instance, Bindu, an actress specialising in roles of termagants, molls and prostitutes plays the second son’s wife in *Do Raaste*. The journalist and film critic Deepa Gahlot writes: “In the 1969 melodrama newcomer Bindu played the classic homebreaker --- rich girl married into a happy joint family—who starts creating misunderstanding between brothers and, urged on by her mother, forces her husband to abandon his family”(Gahlot 292).<sup>54</sup> She is shown to repent when her formerly meek husband slaps her towards the end of the movie. The melodramatic register is maintained all throughout. Evil, in the form of the scheming outsider (daughter-in-law), is traditionally routed as good (family togetherness and unity of the extended family) comes to the fore. Through commercial cinema’s support of patriarchal discourse, the audience clearly receives the message about the manner in which female subversion of hegemony is to be tackled. It also strengthens the traditional concept of woman as male property:

Husband and wife have never been regarded as equals. Two thousand years ago, the upper-caste law codifier Manu wrote that a husband, “though destitute of virtue, or seeking pleasure elsewhere, or devoid of good qualities,” must be “constantly worshipped as a god by a faithful wife.” (41)

The urban Indian audience as an interpretive community would also read the message conveyed in a particular style and manner with the help of certain pre-conceived cultural notions and values. Bombay cinema, especially from the 1960s onwards, is not ambiguous in any sense, but conveys the intended message in very overt terms. The audience is very clearly told the ‘oughts’ and ‘ought nots’ of the situation.

Gender stereotyping is a common feature of Hindi cinema. The women characters are discouraged from showing signs of excessive intelligence. There are hardly any instances of Bombay Cinema whereby the female characters are portrayed as individuals following intellectually challenging career goals. Even if they are depicted initially as women with careers, upon meeting the hero, they quickly come to the realisation that their place in life is that of homemaker. In *Haan Maine Bhi Pyaar Kiya* (2001), the stock formulas of commercial Indian cinema are seen repeating themselves. Karishma Kapoor, a talented young actress is portrayed as an educated girl who discards her career to marry her boyfriend Abhishek Bachchan. She becomes a housewife and he an upcoming executive. On a trip to Switzerland, the husband has a one night adulterous relationship with an old female friend. Karishma divorces him, but later repents. In a rather absurd scene, the hero berates the heroine for her inability to forgive and forget what he refers to as a trivial error on his part. She later remarries the erring husband, rejecting the idea of marrying an established man who genuinely loves her. The moral of the tale follows the hegemonic discourse of Indian society. A woman is incomplete without marriage and a husband. Marriage, even if unhappy, is for a lifetime and while men can be excused occasional lapses, never so the woman. Typically patriarchal behaviour patterns are exhibited by all male heroes in Hindi cinema, a required form to assure the position of the hero within the minds of his audience. “The traditional middle-class Indian male is also required to display these qualities in order to gain the approval of his peers”(Atrey and Kirpal 42). The patriarchal discourse never falters in repeating its insistent message. For instance, Sridevi, a competent and ruthless businesswoman in the 1991 film *Laadla*, is shown gaining true marital bliss in mundane marital domesticity as a housewife, having donated all her wealth. The last scene of the film shows a once dynamic woman entrepreneur happily engaged in menial domestic tasks attired in traditional garb, sending her husband off to work.

In film and social discourse, women are clearly posited in their traditional roles. Divakaruni's illustrates this in an ironic portrayal of Sudha's bride-viewing ceremony which has certain stereotypical cinematic touches. The questions asked by Mrs. Sanyal and the accompanying answers from Sudha follow a time-worn pattern: “what was her



favourite subject in school (embroidery) . . . what does she think should be a woman's most important duty (taking care of those she loves)''(115). But in Indian society, the influence cinema has on social interactions and often vice versa leads to a constant overlapping of the two in socio-cultural senses. The upper classes despise cinema, but do not refrain from constant viewing of movies and therefore internalising its values. It is an ironical dichotomy peculiar to the intricate structuring of urban Indian society.

Hindi cinema acts as a propaganda machine for the dominant patriarchal ideologies, often reinforcing their oppressive stands in subversive ways. For instance, in a crowded metropolis such as Mumbai, people cohabit as extended families because of a dearth of accommodation and an excessive rise in the cost of living. Accommodation shortage is, and has been, a chronic problem for Mumbai city. Yet, when a unit within a particular extended family breaks away to set up its own nuclear home, the imposed socio-cultural overtones imply that a highly selfish act has been perpetrated by the unit concerned upon the extended family. It is also perceived as implying lack of care and consideration for elderly parents and younger siblings. Cinema further stresses the fact that a woman's rightful place is with her husband's family and not her parental home. Films such as *Hum AapKe Hain Kaun* (1994) and more recently *Hum Saath Saath Hain* (2000) constantly emphasise the importance of the in-laws' home for the girl. Another example is the 2001 film *Hum Dil De Chuke Sanam* (2001) in which a young girl is berated by her natal family for daring to seek comfort with them after a conflict with her marital family. Echoes of such cultural discourses are found in Bumiller's accounts. Discussing the arranged marriage of an upper-middle class North Indian couple, the Bharat Rams, Bumiller repeats the comments and attitudes of the wife Manju Bharat Ram who " . . . kept reminding herself that her mother always said a woman has to compromise a lot. She also used to say, 'If you're unhappy, unless its really bad, don't tell me' "(30).

A newly-married woman is told by the elders that the woman's place is always in her in-laws home. Movies stressing these values have usually been extremely successful at the box-office; *Hum AapKe Hain Kaun* broke records for all times. Atrey and Kirpal explain this phenomenon within the Indian social discourse:

The patriarchal concept that, after marriage, a girl must break all ties with her parents and siblings is rooted in shrewd economic considerations. It is meant to keep the family property within the family, designating only the sons as rightful heirs. (17)

Another important feature contributing to the great success of *Hum Aapke Hain Kaun* and other such films is the fact that it depicted the in-laws' home as one where the daughter-in-law and all family members co-exist in an extended family in great harmony (unlike real life). The film critic, Madhu Jain says about the film: "This is not the family as it is, but as it should be" (317).<sup>55</sup>

This chapter has analysed the influence of Bombay cinema on the mass culture of the Indian nation. Linked to this is the issue of the influence of Indian commercial cinema being portrayed from certain perspectives by the urban Indian women writers in their fictional works. This reveals some specific points of interest. The most important is that the repetitive plot patterns of Hindi commercial cinema will not alter easily, as they are based on what is a "Dharmik value-system" in cinematic terms. Vijay Mishra explains the private motivations supporting the system:

it also has a strong private motive because in making the essential conflict a dharmik one, the forms of resolution become quite naturally pre-textual and hence, in a curious way, a justification for the film industry's own existence: the film too, finally has a matrix enshrined in all Indian texts, and is, therefore, morally beyond reproach. Dharma then is both the larger narrative, an organizing principle, and a screen that hides the blatant inconsistencies inherent at all levels in the filmic text. It also hides the very processes of monopoly and exploitation that produce the text. The illusory unity of the text achieved sometimes through an excessive demonstration of the grammar of dharma . . . is no more than a systematic ploy aimed at deflecting the exploitative nature of the economic and social orders.(15)

Such 'dharma' can be linked with the manipulative elements in the social hegemonic discourse. Through the power of the dominant discourse, the cinema viewers are duped, as are the characters in the novels. Adherence to Dharma or duty is the underlying note in

all messages sent out by elders such as Mrs. Sanyal, Sunil's father (*Sister of My Heart*), Sita (*The Thousand Faces of Night*), Saroja's Amma (*Tamarind Mem*) in an effort to secure consensual control over the lives of their offspring. When Ramesh supports Sudha against an abortion, his mother brings out cliched interpretations of dharma:

She accused him of forgetting all the hardships she had been through after his father died—the times she'd gone hungry so the children could eat, the nights she'd lain awake worrying, the insults she'd endured. She asked him if a pretty face outweighed all that. (Divakaruni 250-1)

The popular culture bombards the masses with the dominant ideologies. Judith Williamson comments:

We may feel we are free to slip in and out of “mass culture” in the form of movies, TV magazines or pulp fiction, but nowadays we know better than to imagine we can exist outside ideology. The concept of ideology also brings with it, from Marxism, suggestions about power and function and class. Speaking broadly, the whole point about most of the ideologies manifested in mass cultural “texts” is that they are dominant or hegemonic ideologies and are therefore likely to be intimately connected with that very class which is furthest from the “masses”.

(100)

In postcolonial India, the ideology that dominates is that of the new rich whose wealth is often coupled with minimal education. Their ideology holds sway in the cinematic world. This ideology situates women as wives, mothers and dependants in film after film and stresses the ‘dharmik order’ ritualistically. Individualism and rational thinking are never encouraged, especially in the female sex. Also emphasised above all else, is the importance of extended family and complete obedience to the laws of the elders. In *Kabhi Khushi Kabhi Gum* (2001), the young daughter-in-law living in London is eternally unhappy because of lack of acceptance from her husband's family. She moralises continually, claiming that a good married woman is she who is both a good wife and a good daughter-in-law. Her pious and sanctimonious attitude is at odds with her insulting comments about and covert rudeness to the Anglo-Saxons. The attitude is

the old archetypal Indian film staple of the 'Western Evil and the Oriental Goodness' (Mishra 15).

The audience acceptance of the hegemonically discursive films as well as a certain interpretive cultural community labelling such an oppressive discourse 'common-sense' is disturbing to those attempting to establish a more egalitarian social discourse. Gramsci, while acknowledging the power of the media, had pointed out the risks inherent within the connotations of this. "Common sense reigns, often unrecognized or valorized as critical wisdom, and eradicates the possibility of alternatives, presenting as natural, inevitable and intelligible the present state of affairs" (Landy 16).

Cinema is an indelible influence in the lives of Indians and certain sections of society live the ideology on a daily basis. The impact of cinema on youth subculture has been explored to some extent. Cinema is a factor in youth clothing fashions, career choices and most importantly in the youthful interpretation of the concepts of love and romance. I have tried to link the element of fantasy that is so much a part of the Indian socio-cultural ethos with the cinematic interpretations of romance and then explored the perspective of the novelists on this issue. The general conclusion is that the rigid order of Indian cinema refuses to reflect most of the progressive reforms occurring within Indian society and the dominant ideology does its best to shackle independent thinking outside predetermined boundaries. But the very fact that such cinema is always being made shows that as an audience urban society itself has reached a point of apathy in some respects, and a comfort zone in others.

The resistance to change in this discourse may even be attributed to the Indian academia and intelligentsia who may consider interference in 'mass culture' demeaning to their intellectual abilities. The comfort zone of the majority of the audience stems from their being habituated to the consensual control of the patriarchal discourse, which they consider beneficial to their interests. Cinematic discourse reflects the constant restrictions on forward-thinking ideas, a typical feature of the Indian socio-cultural system, which balks at change in psychological and emotional terms. If change is to occur it will be not

just through the medium of “offbeat” or “Art” films. The producers of mainstream commercial cinema must awaken to its potential as a powerful discursive tool, and attempt to be instrumental in bringing a change by circumventing the hegemonic discursiveness in film ideology, as the authors have penetrated the socio-cultural discourse and functioned from within to resist hegemony. The Gramscian theorist, Esteve Morera claims:

The laws of history are in some sense emergent upon the activity of real men and women and, above all, they depend on, among other thing, the social relations that structure society. Such laws, then, are not independent of what human beings do, though they at the same time determine their activity, or at least, the general conditions under which they act. The constitution of a new historical bloc, which is equivalent to the constitution of new social relations, and hence the emergence of new laws, is a process of transformation which begins in the old historical bloc, and one whose outcome depends on the structure of the old bloc and on the political organization of groups and classes determined by the old social relations. (103)

Until then, Kakar’s theories comprehensively explain the predicament faced by the urban Indian marriage and the obstacles to the growth of a loving and intimate man-wife relationship:

An overwhelming issue in fiction (and patients) from (and of) the middle – and upper-middle class social milieu is the profound yearning of a wife, as a woman, for a missing intimacy with the husband— as a man. Generally fated for disappointment, the fantasy of constituting a ‘couple’ not in opposition to the rest of the extended family but within this wider network, is a dominant theme running through women’s lives, actual and fictional. Connecting the various stages of a woman’s adulthood, from an expectant bride to a more sober grandmother, the intense wish to create a two-person universe with the husband where each finally ‘recognizes’ the other, is never far from her consciousness. It stands as a beacon of hope amidst the toil, drudgery, fights, disappointments, and occasional joys of her stormy existence within the extended family. ... the Indian ‘romantic’ yearning is not for an exploring of the depths of erotic passion, or for being swept off the feet by a masterful man. It is a much quieter affair with the soul of a Mukesh-song, and when unsatisfied this longing shrivels the emotional life of many women, making some go through life as mere maternal

automatons. Others, though, react with an inner desperation where, as one woman puts it, even the smell of the husband is a daily torture that must be borne in a silent scream. The desired intimacy, forever subduing the antagonism between husband and wife, inherent in the division of sexes and culturally exaggerated, is the real *sasural*—the husband's home --- to which a girl looks forward after marriage and which even a married woman keeps on visiting and revisiting in the hidden vaults of her imagination. (1996 23)

Within the fictional discourse, one may observe that the constant yearning on part of the women leads to a search for different avenues for emotional warmth and intimacy.

*The yearning that shoots up from the soles of my feet when I think of Ashok, is it love? I am not sure. It is so different in its nature from the craving pull, gut and sinew and womb, that I feel for my sister and my daughter.*

*Sister of My Heart (310)*

### Chapter Three: The Cultural World of the Novels

*Thank God we Indians are not obsessed with love.  
The Thousand Faces of Night (55)*

The novels are located within urban Indian upper middle class socio-cultural situations. They portray a tightly structured society bound by caste and community rules and operating within a specific discourse of patriarchal hegemony. Within such a discourse, the boundaries between ‘cultural insider’ and ‘cultural outsider’ are very clearly demarcated. As the chapter progresses, the skill of the authors in creating characters who occupy the space in between, the ‘no man’s land’, in the lines between the cultural insider and outsider, will be explored. Such characters appear as subversive tools used by the women writers in their portrayal of the hegemonic discourse.

With regard to both the narratives and the audience, the idea of the ‘cultural insider/outsider’ will become clearer if certain aspects of the cultural world of the novels are further explored. The cultural world has been described from a socio-historical perspective to some extent in Chapter One. The cultural features prioritised within the novels are primarily the overwhelming importance of the extended families of the protagonists (in the case of married women, the natal and marital family are of equal importance) and linked to this is the lack of importance attached to individual relationships especially the relationship between a married couple. For instance, Anju’s (*Sister of My Heart*) relationship with Sunil stagnates after the initial romantic phase coupled with sexual euphoria because the marital interactions are caught in a maze of other relationships, which deny the newly married couple the precious time and energy required to prioritise their developing marital relationship. Anju’s interest in her cousin Sudha’s welfare, her mother’s and aunts’ lives and Sunil’s desire to be free of what he perceives as financial obligation to his father; all these issues hardly leave any time for the young couple to nurture their relationship after an arranged marriage.

The selected texts contain many similarities in the form of arranged marriages suffering interference of parents and varied social pressures within these marriages. Given these cultural parallels within the novels, the protagonists may themselves be considered as members of a group which owing to strong socio-cultural and other similarities would tend to encode and decode cultural messages in a specific way using certain common ideological keys. Stuart Hall, the cultural theorist in his essay "Encoding, Decoding" discusses the process of the audience encoding and decoding received messages.<sup>56</sup> According to Hall, "In actual social existence messages have a 'complex structure of dominance,' therefore they are 'imprinted' by 'institutional power relations.' "(Hall 1999 508) Hall also feels that messages are received at a particular stage only if they are recognisable and appropriate.

Hall outlines three major reading positions. The idea is that any text encodes an intended, or "preferred", meaning, but that the reader may not decode the message within the 'preferred' interpretive frame. The interpretive positions are:

- I. within the frame of the dominant code: decoding as the encoders would have it, or, within their interpretive frame;
- II. adopting a negotiated position: the reader accepts some aspects of the dominant meaning, but rejects and alters others, to suit their understandings and goals;
- III. reading from an oppositional point of view: reading subversively, against the dominant or preferred meanings.<sup>57</sup>

As a note, one can also imagine a rogue reading, in which the reader appropriates the message for purposes quite other than was intended; and one can imagine differentiating between knowing readings, in which the audience member is aware of the position she is taking *vis a vis* the message, and innocent reading, in which the audience member is not aware of her positionality.



The protagonists appear to decode many messages stressing the importance of the hegemonic discourse in a typical mode of acceptance. But often the encoded message is decoded in a clearly subversive or negotiated manner. Kamini (*Tamarind Mem*) has obeyed her mother and performed well academically. She has then, used that same education as a route to escape the traditional discourse of an arranged marriage and moved to Canada for her doctoral work. Sunil who is dutifully handing out money to his father is doing so in a bid to claim what he perceives as his lost self- respect and freedom (Divakaruni 197) and not out of a sense of filial duty as might have been expected within the discursive strategies of hegemony. Chapter Six explores this issue in greater detail.

The women protagonists often internalise their frustration at the obstacles placed in their quest for formal education and higher qualifications depending on the generational situations. They pay a great emotional price to achieve their aims, or often never achieve them. Anju passionately longs for a university education. She is married off after high school to Sunil, who is based in America (for many Indians the ultimate land of dreams) and experiences a burdensome sense of obligation towards Sunil owing to his silent yet implied criticism. Conversations between Anju and Sunil often lead to major conflicts as Anju feels: “Maybe it’s because I’m all worked up, but I seem to hear something else in his voice. *See how lucky you are to live in this free and easy American culture, to have a magnanimous husband like me*”(Divakaruni 203). Anju realises that for a traditional Indian woman post-marital freedoms are not rights, they are hand-outs for which she is expected to experience a sense of constant gratitude toward the husband. A discerning reader could raise the issue of basic rights of human beings. It may be argued that dominant Indian cultural discourses do not appear to question the injustice of women having to plead with males for basic human rights such as the right to education within a system of man-made oppression. Sunil is not a living god and nor is Saroja’s Appa (*Tamarind Mem*). But both Saroja and Anju are made to feel constantly obligated to father and husband for being allowed to access education. Saroja, who is from an earlier social era, receives harsher treatment than Anju and is completely denied her wish to study medicine. But neither Anju nor Saroja, each forthright women, questions the intrinsic unfairness of a social order that allows one gender so much control over the lives

of the opposite sex. Anju is not querying that premise although she is angry and upset as she experiences a sense of gendered discrimination.

Within the conservative, patriarchal discourse of upper middle class Hindu India, the forthright and outspoken Anju is a cultural outsider in many aspects. But her caste and social status locate her as a cultural insider. Within the narrative structure however, she occupies a somewhat ambiguous cultural position as both insider and outsider. She occupies the spaces termed by Trinh T. Minh-ha as “the in-between zones.” Trinh writes: “Violations of boundaries have always led to displacement, for the in-between zones are the shifting grounds on which the (doubly) exiled walk”(70). Anju faces the situation of the doubly exiled, she is after marriage a woman exiled in an alien culture, but as a young girl also she faced the situation of being culturally alien on home ground.

But the hegemonic discourse has not ceased to exercise a certain level of influence over the married Anju. She still functions within the framework of a situation of consensual control, whereby she demands that Sunil concede her rights, though not grudgingly and in a condescending manner. She never questions the idea of his being able to grant the rights or having the ability to do so in the first place. This arises from the process of socialization she has undergone as a Hindu girl in a traditional household. Hanna Papanek’s ideas further support this argument:

Women, like men, get a sense of their value to others from the way they are treated by them – a process that begins in early childhood and continues throughout life. Explicitly, as well as covertly, people get messages from those around them on which to base a sense of their value to others; in turn, their sense of self – worth is, at least in part, a reflection of the value they feel they have for others.<sup>58</sup>

(Papanek 169)

The younger generation of protagonists is well-educated in the modern Indian educational system which is modelled on the Western educational patterns. Some such as Sunil (*Sister of My Heart*) and Devi (*The Thousand Faces of Night*) have obtained higher qualifications in the West. But there is also the common parental expectation that these younger protagonists will not flout parental authority regardless of gender. In keeping

with the culturally dominant discourse, Devi obediently returns from an American university to an arranged marriage, finding her subservient personality is no match for her strong-willed mother's dictates. The inter-play of parent-child relations forms a vital part of the narratives. The cultural discourse incessantly reiterates the innate rightness of all parental dictates bolstered by the forces of religious sanction. Older generations validate their dominance over the family using hegemonic tools. Time and again, the narratives culturally validate the Gramscian theory of consensual control as practised by the dominant group. Devi's father-in-law explains to her: "We knew what filial piety meant. We would never have thought of questioning our parents' wisdom. I saw my wife for the first time on our wedding day. We were blessed with a special kind of trust you don't find anymore"(Hariharan 62). The power of consensual control is observed in Baba's decoding of submission to parental hegemony as a blessing. There is the implicit expectation on his part that Devi as daughter-in-law and wife, will also decode the message encoded within the hegemonic structures in an identical manner.

The textual analysis reveals that in the case of women, the hegemonic dominance is more pronounced. Had Devi been a son she might have been permitted to stay in America and build a somewhat independent existence. Within Indian society, a son is given some awareness of selfhood, unlike a daughter, whose: "subordination is total at almost all stages of her life"(Atrey and Kirpal 97). Though Sunil rebels verbally against his father's tyrannical domination of the entire household and especially his mother (Divakaruni 172-4), he is nevertheless, caught in the cycle of constant adherence to parental dictates and does agree to an arranged marriage. Being a male in an urban Indian home, he is at least accorded the right to insist on certain factors such as an arranged marriage without dowry. During the formal bride-viewing ceremony, when his father hints at dowry, Sunil interrupts: " 'Father!' says Sunil, 'We agreed there was to be no dowry discussion'"(132) whereas Devi, a daughter, subjugates herself completely to maternal authority:

my mother prepared me for my *swayamvara*<sup>59</sup>. When I was adept at wearing the right jewels and sari, the right smile; when I made the naïve and therefore innocent small talk suitable for a marriageable girl among her elders; when she has fed and stoked the rapidly returning memories of my grandmother's stories of

predestined husbands and idyllic marriages, Amma played her next card.

(Hariharan 16)

However, the sense of selfhood and independence is granted to the Indian son at a great cost. He always carries within himself the burden of being a male child. Responsibility to his family is the watchword of his life and his natal family will under no circumstances let him forget it. Especial closeness to his wife may be often interpreted as a betrayal of wider family interests. Hence Mrs. Sanyal's anger upon Ramesh's mild support of Sudha's arrangements to visit her parental home without prior permission from Mrs. Sanyal (Divakaruni 206-7). Usha Kumar explains further the unfairness of a social discourse which creates a pathetic situation for the new bride:

A bride's entry into her husband's family is at best anxiety provoking and at worst humiliating. The sense of being an outsider, coupled with the awkwardness of her relationship with her husband, leads to intense feelings of isolation and nostalgia for her parents' home. Not fully accepted in the husband's family and not completely released of her emotional ties with her parents' family, she feels a confusion of identity. Overwhelmed by her loneliness, she may be given to moodiness, frequently somatizing some of her internal conflicts. Her coping behaviour lies in seeking recourse to "playing" the daughter-in-law role and keeping her real feelings to herself.<sup>60</sup>

(Kumar 152)

The new bride can be cited as the best instance of one who is at once cultural insider/outsider within a native cultural discourse. The paradoxical nature of the situation in arranged marriages can be decoded by culturally observant readers. Whether it be Sudha or Anju (*Sister of My Heart*), Devi (*The Thousand Faces of Night*) or Saroja (*Tamarind Mem*), no one finds complete acceptance within the marital family; yet they have been chosen by the in-laws to marry their sons and further the lineage. The narrative structures depict the sterility often found in arranged marriages based on external suitability. The discourse carries an irrational element of contrariness and serving of vested interest appears paramount as opposed to helping the younger generation create a strong marriage and united family. This socio-cultural hegemony is a clever subversion of the ancient Hindu marital discourses as outlined in the scriptures. These ancient discourses stress the

importance of the couple over all else, given the sacred status accorded to marriage in the Hindu social system. According to the Hindu historian, Dr. A.S. Altekar:

The principle of absolute identity of the interests of the couple followed as a natural corollary from the recognition of the fact that the husband and wife are the complements of each other. . . .

Wife alone is the husband's truest friend, counsel and companion. . . .

The husband is therefore to treat his wife as his dearest friend. The wife is the true friend of a man, says a Vedic passage, and the *Mahabharata* concurs with it.

(113-14)

Deshpande's novel explores the idea of intermarrying within the family to retain complete cultural identity, but even that fails, as the husband and wife (Shripati and Kalyani) do not operate within a uniform marital discourse, and family tyranny in the form of Kalyani's domineering mother, Manorama, again comes into play. The novel also portrays the affection Sumi's sister-in-law feels for her; but the harmonious union of Gopal and Sumi could equally be attributed to the lack of interference from Gopal's family as he is an orphan. Devi (*The Thousand Faces of Night*) and Sudha (*Sister of My Heart*) are the two female protagonists who appear to cope by playing daughter-in-law as they cannot have the joyful intimacy of wifehood. Sudha, in particular, appears to be confused about her sense of self, groping to understand and construct a new identity as a married woman:

But this early hour when I sit at our bedroom window. . . . It is the one time I have to ponder my life, to feel the shape of this new woman I am becoming. Who is this Basudha who applies to the parting of her hair after bath each day an unwavering line of sindur to ensure her husband's prosperity. She puzzles me as she looks out from the mirror . . . . A ring of keys weigh down the end of her sari, but she bears the weight well. (77)

But the dichotomy of the roles is internalised:

But the early morning, before I'm plunged into responsibility, allows me time to remember the Sudha I used to be. It seems impossible that I was the girl who ran panting to the terrace to wish on a falling star, who begged Pishi for stories of princesses and demons and saw herself in those stories. (179)

In the process of pandering to vested parental and societal interests, the individual identities of women such as Devi (*The Thousand Faces of Night*) and Sudha are subsumed in the unilateral cultural identity of the daughter-in-law or the 'bahu' as stressed in cinematic discourse. Women like Anju (*Sister of My Heart*) and Saroja (*Tamarind Mem*) move outside the role of cultural insiders from the very beginning by verbally challenging the ceaseless interference of consensual control systems within their individual lives. For instance, Saroja values education above marriage and offends her family by openly asserting: "With all those degrees I don't need a marriage degree" (170).

As a perpetrator of hegemony, Sunil's father is constantly creating a situation of strife and misunderstanding between Anju and Sunil (*Sister of My Heart*). During an argument with Sunil, his father taunts him: "'Quite the hero, aren't you?' spits out Sunil's father. 'Want to impress your new wife, huh? I wonder how impressed she would be if she knew about your American exploits, all that drinking and whoring'" (173). His tyrannical nature uses the hegemonic discourse as an instrument of control. Anju notices: "he enjoys quoting derogatory passages about women from the Hindu scriptures" (171).

The texts show most of the older generation using every aspect of the hegemonic discourse to obtain further control over the younger protagonists. From a postcolonial perspective, the elders appear to be emulating the strategies the some well-positioned Indians used during the Raj to greatly strengthen their position vis a vis their own people. In the context of British colonial control of India, Gayatri Spivak notes that: ". . . the indigenous elite found that wonderful structure of repression a structure they could identify with and could use to actually entrench their own positions" (Spivak 77).<sup>61</sup> This comment is a useful analytical tool in understanding women such as Sita (*The Thousand Faces of Night*) and Mrs. Sanyal (*Sister of My Heart*) who have taken utmost advantage of the prevalent discourse to control their social environment and particularly their children. Their ability to manipulate the dominant discourse lies in their efficiency in creating situations of control, wielding the discourse itself as an instrument to create conditions wherein they can sustain their dominance. For instance, Ramesh's mother marries him to Sudha, a fatherless girl from a financially unstable background, as the

weaker position of Sudha's natal home strengthens her domination over both Ramesh and his wife. Morera asserts: "The meaning of consensus in Gramsci's theory of hegemony must be found not in the apparent willingness of an individual to engage in certain activities, but rather in the conditions for that willingness to be present" (165).

These women also occupy 'in-between zones' within the discourse, as they have used hegemony to entrench their positions of domination instead of reinforcing the image of docile wives and mothers. Atrey and Kirpal refer to the sociologist Veena Das's analysis of these women as 'female patriarchs'<sup>62</sup>:

Despite the patriarchal character of the Indian family, there exists an independent community of women which evolves as a result of the taboo on the interaction between the sexes. This community which has already internalized patriarchal values now ensures the conditioning of the female child into her social role of docile daughter/wife/mother. . . . Das, describes these women as "female patriarchs", old women who may often speak on behalf of men. (15)

But a subversive reading would imply that their dominating demeanour would encode a message of assertion both for their offspring and certain sections of the audience, particularly younger female members of the audience as well as many men.

The protagonists hail from families which are placed on the upper rungs of the caste hierarchy regardless of their financial status. Anju is marriageable even without a dowry as she is a daughter of the 'illustrious Chatterjees' (Divakaruni 12) and she is also a Brahmin. The families in the novels are those which have a social standing based on certain factors, most importantly caste and access to education. The specific social positioning of protagonists within the texts will be discussed in detail in Chapter Four. All the families of the main characters in the novels have had money at one stage or the other, even if their present financial situation is at times depicted as precarious. There are usually some assets to fall back upon. For instance, after Gopal (*A Matter of Time*) leaves home, Sumi can move back with her parents to find temporary support and take time out to put her life and the lives of her daughters in order. The real estate agent, Nagaraj, awakens in Sumi an awareness of the future financial worth of her parental legacy:

“When you have this, why do you go searching for houses?”(79). The three older women in Divakaruni’s novel find material security immediately upon selling off their old family mansion and manage a very comfortable retirement.

Most of the female protagonists in the novels are usually able to articulate their problems and situations, at least internally. Their situations as upper caste women from upper middle class homes as well as the fact that they are educated or as in Abha Pishi’s case, value education, enable them to make use of their gifts of articulation. They are uniformly Brahmin women and as Spivak remarks from an insider’s viewpoint: “Brahmin women have always been outspoken”(Spivak 85). They pose a challenge to the discourse which attempts to silence them, sometimes in the guise of parents and sometimes in the form of society at large. When Saroja questions the inequality in resource allocations between siblings on the basis of gender, she is rebuked: “ ‘Mind your tongue Miss Too-smart,’ snaps Amma, this time slapping the side of my head”(Badami 164). Outsiders and relatives do their bit to further suppress the vibrancy of the female offspring. Saroja’s articulation irks her aunt: “Rajji Atthey slaps her forehead and scowls, . . . accusingly: ‘too much of freedom, too cheeky, no shame! She is going to bring her parents grief, listen to me’ ” (165).

The narratives express a common desire on the part of the younger generation to escape ongoing parental domination. Whether through education or marriage, they all find escape routes. Sunil (*Sister of My Heart*) goes to the USA to study and stays on, Devi (*The Thousand Faces of Night*) agrees to an arranged marriage and Kamini (*Tamarind Mem*) chooses Canada as the venue for higher studies. Even Ramesh’s (*Sister of My Heart*) engineering job involving constant touring appears to be an avenue of escape from family pressures. It is a place where he can function as an autonomous individual and not merely as an extension of his domineering mother. Within the texts, there is evidence of attempts by the younger female protagonists, to confront the problems and create a new hegemony. For instance, Sudha (*Sister of My Heart*) places her faith in her sister and her love for her daughter above the patriarchal pressures of matrimony. The best example is Sumi (*A Matter of Time*), who confronts her past and present to build a stronger future for



herself. Morera points out: “For Gramsci, the emergence of a new hegemony is a genuine act of historical creation in which a class, showing that it is capable of solving all the problems of the moment, can forge a higher moral and intellectual system”(166). Most of the younger generation initially appears intent on escape and the reader can discern an unwillingness to present an absolute challenge to the dominant discourse to form a new order. Even the outspoken women protagonists refuse to formulate a distinct hegemony of their own, though they are able to step outside the mainstream cultural discourse and act as participant-observers articulating their dilemmas.

Ramesh (*Sister of My Heart*) is a cultural insider in almost every sense except in his extreme gentleness toward his wife. There is no sign of the dominant and controlling mode of behaviour in his physical and emotional interactions with Sudha. But the reader can construe the absence of hegemonic interaction as a manifestation of the basic weakness in his character, rendering him completely ineffective in the role of a protective husband and father. The other characters mentioned in the previous paragraph again occupy the boundary spaces between cultural insider/outsider. They all step out at different times to assert themselves as individuals outside the cultural norms and turn their back on the systems of consensual control. Devi (*The Thousand Faces of Night*) moves outside her arranged marriage to take on a musician lover from another caste and community; Kamini (*Tamarind Mem*) rejects marriage altogether and Sunil openly verbalises his distaste and anger toward his father. He has also stepped completely outside the cultural discourse by falling in love with his sister-in-law.

A reader could also look at Divakaruni’s novel in a totally subversive manner and read it as a negative insight into the Bengali obsession with the erstwhile Nobel laureate and poet Rabindranath Tagore.<sup>63</sup> A dominant feature of Tagore’s life was his adulterous love for his beautiful sister-in-law Kadambari (evidence of this is also found in Sunil Gangopadhyay’s semi-historical work *First Light* or *Prathom Alo*)<sup>64</sup> Tagore’s feelings for Kadambari destabilised his own marital life. The Bengali anthropologist Manisha Roy, in her study cites cases of Bengali upper-middle class women engaged in adulterous

relationships with brothers-in-law (1972 106-15). Such subversive reading can also present the dangers of 'rogue reading' if carried too far.

The protagonists through different routes move beyond the mainstream cultural discourse and function as 'in-between zone' characters in varied instances. Therefore, in certain ways they pose a challenge to the dominant discourse thereby irking the vested interests. Extending further the argument on the cultural insider/outsider issue, the audience would normally comprise elements occupying the space in between the insider/outsider. It is also possible for a complete cultural outsider to experience empathy with the narratives. The audience for the selected texts could never decode the messages encoded within the fictional discourse on a completely culturally alien basis as these narratives deal with issues such as marriage, family, parent-child relations and so on and these are universal human issues, albeit located within a distinct socio-cultural milieu. The cultural theorist Trinh T. Minh-ha analyses:

There can hardly be such a thing as an essential insider that can be homogeneously represented by all insiders; an authentic insider in there, an absolute reality out there, or an incorrupted representative who cannot be questioned by another incorrupted representative. (75)

Trinh's ideas are highly relevant in conjunction with Fish's concept of the interpretive community of readers. There is no perfectly ideal reader who interprets flawlessly and interacts with the text to produce the perfect meaning. Chapter Two briefly explored Stanley Fish's concept of the 'interpretive community of readers'. The literary theorist, Stanley Fish, has analysed reader response and the reading function in relation to the actual structure of the text. According to him the reading activity is never mechanical (2). Fish asserts that the reader carries joint responsibility along with the text as regards the production of meaning. The meaning from the text therefore becomes an 'event' rather than an 'entity'. Meaning grows gradually between the words in the text and the reader's response. Fish says: "The reader's response . . . is the meaning"(ibid). Fish goes on to discuss the idea that literature is an "open category"(11) defined by what the reader decides to put in it. The collective decision to recognise a text as literature does not lead

to the disappearance of the reader as a “free and autonomous subject” (ibid), but rather the reader obtains a greater voice in shaping the beliefs that form her/his world.

Fish discusses the importance of an interpretive community of readers between whom and the text there occurs the event of production of meaning in the process of reading the text. Hall, in a similar vein, refers to “the consumption or reception” of the . . . message as a “moment of the production process in its larger sense”(Hall 1999 509). Hall insists that to produce a successful effect, satisfy a need or be put to use, the message must be clearly decoded. It has to be: “appropriated as a meaningful discourse”(ibid). Meaning and consumption are linked. He asserts: “if the meaning is not articulated in practice, it has no effect”(ibid). Taking this assertion with regard to fiction, it is as if without the audience, the book does not exist. This can also be linked to Hall’s idea that the reader/audience is both the receiver and the source of the message (ibid).

The narratives exist differently within the minds of the readers. Even in the presence of cultural similarities there can exist many differences in interpretation. For instance, urban middle class Indian women might regard a protagonist such as Sita (*The Thousand Faces of Night*) as a domestic tyrant, a devoted mother, a complex individual, or in a variety of other ways based on individual structures of interpretation which in turn are influenced by certain cultural factors. But as Trinh elaborates:

This is not to say that the historical “I” can be obscured or ignored, and that differentiation cannot be made; but that “I” is not unitary, culture has never been monolithic, and more or less is always more or less in relation to a judging subject. (76)

Within the context of reader-response theory, it is important to note that India has had a very long tradition of literary theory and criticism in Sanskrit, stretching back some five thousand years. The postcolonialist Bill Ashcroft explains:

The Sanskrit tradition moves from text to a general theory of literature, embracing not only an evaluation and interpretation of the text, but also a theory of production and consumption. In one of its most influential forms, the *dhvani-rasa* distinction, such theory lays equal stress on the suggestive possibility within the text (*dhvani*) and the effect of the potential for meaning and feeling in the various realisers:

reader/spectator, actor/author, 'character,' who collectively embody the text's suggestion in realised emotional states (*bhavas*) according to the traditional classification of emotions (*rasas*). This assertion of literary practice as a dual site of production and consumption makes Indian criticism readily disposed to see much contemporary European and American concern with 'poetics' as less a revolutionary activity than an 'already given' of Indian indigenous aesthetics. (120)

It is important to keep the above argument in mind when Indian readership is analysed as it provides a vital link with the ideas outlined by Fish on issues of the production and consumption of meaning in the reading process.

With regard to the novels being studied, for the reader to skilfully decode the socio-cultural discourse within which the fictional characters function, it is worthwhile to scrutinise certain biographical features of the writers. They are all well-educated urban Indian women. Deshpande holds a degree in Law, Divakaruni, a doctorate in English, Hariharan is a University lecturer and Badami has qualified in the fields of English and Journalism. All of them are also upper caste Hindu Indian women from families of good social standing. The authorial background has definitely influenced the creation of a fictional world within which the autobiographical elements are undeniable. For instance, Badami describes in her interview with Angela Kozminuk her childhood in railway colonies as the daughter of a government official serving in the Indian railways:

The railways were a British institution; the railways and colonies were set up by the British and so when they left the place was simply taken by Indians who still retained some of the anglicized ways and manners and mixed them up with their ways . . . (Kozminuk "A Conversation with Anita Rau Badami" 3)

These authors turn their observations of the lives of urban Indians into events in the lives of their characters in a story which can then reach the audiences. Hall stresses that for an event to become communicative, it must first become a story (1999 510). This is achieved through the encoding of a message which will then be decoded by the model reader or target audience. The authors write very much as Indian upper-middle class women with Brahmin origins. To state that the authors appear to be writing for a certain section of audiences, particularly female audiences, who can decode the cultural modes

and messages incorporated within the novels, would be a very narrow analysis. The hidden meanings encoded within the texts may be most easily understood by that group but equally, the authors are taking a certain amount of cosmopolitanism and awareness of cultural diversity for granted on the part of their readers. The authors' own theories regarding readership have to be borne in mind. For instance, the following interview given by Divakaruni to 'Atlantic Unbound' elaborates her ideas:

Q. Although your fiction concerns itself with Indian characters, it does not presuppose a knowledge of India. Do you have an audience in mind when you write?

A. When I write I try not to think about audience. When I begin to wonder what particular readers would think, what they would like, and what might offend them, I often come back to thinking about what my mother would have to say -- and that really freezes me. So I try to forget about it as I'm writing. But I have always thought in terms of gender rather than race, if I have thought about it at all. And since my writing is so much about women, I would ultimately say I write for women and intelligent men.

I would very much like women of all backgrounds to pick up my books, because women's experiences are much more similar than we ordinarily think. We can learn so much from one another. When I read something by Mary Gordon, Andrea Barrett, Mary Gaitskill, Louise Erdrich, or Sandra Cisneros, for example -- people writing very different stories out of very different traditions -- I still see the heart of a woman's experience right there, and I can relate to that. I certainly hope people will do the same with my writing.<sup>65</sup>

("A Woman's Place: An Interview with Chitra Banerji Divakaruni." Atlantic Online, 29 October 2003)

Clearly, some cultural knowledge on the part of the audience is taken for granted. But this could occasionally be stretching the resources of even the cultural insider/outsider. For instance, both Divakaruni and Badami, appear to work on an assumption of audience understanding of the importance of horoscopes in a Hindu arranged marriage, particularly amongst Brahmins. They also assume understanding of the intricate Hindu caste system (often indicated by surnames) and the relevance of the caste-system with regard to

matrimonial alliances. Divakaruni's main female protagonists bear the surname 'Chatterjee' which denotes the family's position within the caste-hierarchy, Bengali Brahmins belonging to the *Rarhi sreni* (group), a specific sub-caste of Brahmins hailing from particular regions in Bengal. Anju and Sudha undergo arranged marriages within caste. Sudha marries into the 'Sanyal' family and Anju weds a 'Majumdar'. Both are Bengali Brahmin surnames. This fact may be overlooked by a culturally distanced reader, but not a model or ideal reader who possesses deeper cultural awareness. Hall writes: "Understanding is based on comprehension of a particular discourse"(1999 511). However, the argument for the need of a culturally conversant reader would mean a very parochial interpretation of the concept of cultural understanding, as mere comprehension of all cultural trivia cannot be equated with obtaining deeper insight into a work of fiction due to possession of greater cultural general knowledge.

Janice Radway states that it is accurate to label the theories of critics such as Fish as "reception theories" and their method as "reader-response criticism," because they "continue to posit a confrontation between two distinct and quite different entities, the reader and the text." The reader upon receiving the text "concretizes" the embodied meaning as the author desires to communicate it via the medium of print. According to Radway: ". . . reading is a singular, skilled process, which many readers only partially master and some texts do not fully require"(1974 3).

Radway substantiates her ideas using the concepts put forward by theorists such as Fish and Eco who regard the reading process as 'production or construction instead of consumption' (ibid). She clarifies this, stating that they consider textual meaning as the product of a complex transaction between an inert textual structure, composed of verbal signifiers and an actively productive reader who constructs these signifiers as meaningful signs on the basis of previously learned interpretive procedures and cultural codes. (ibid)

She points out that Umberto Eco has stated that the same message can be decoded differently from various perspectives because of the existence of a multiplicity of codes, contexts and circumstances. Radway asserts that reading is a complex semiotic and

intrinsically social process varying temporally, but Fish's concept of interpretive communities is relevant in discovering the differences in reader preferences. She claims: "if we can detect exactly what it is the readers in a formally recognized group share" (ibid) and how this commonality affects their action upon the printed text, then it may be possible to frame specific questions which can be asked of unconnected individuals to understand their ". . . specific behaviour patterns and modes of literacy" (ibid). In the novels, the 'in-between-zone' characters can be taken as the point of contact between the unconnected individuals and the text. The characters occupying an ambiguous cultural space help culturally distanced readers move into roles of participant-observers. These characters break the rigidity of their own cultural discourse to see their world from an outsider's perspective, providing an opportunity for the distanced reader to act similarly. For instance, the emotional frustrations experienced by Saroja (*Tamarind Mem*) and her responses to it can be understood by the culturally outside reader who is helped by Saroja's own subversion of the discourse to understand the narrative discourse.

Within the narratives, the writers continually subvert the hegemonic codes while ostensibly locating the characters in the midst of mainstream discourses. To further this subversion they create the 'in-between-zone characters', who function as instruments to challenge the hegemonic discourse. These characters give voice to certain different means through which to subvert the codes within the dominant system, reinterpreting them in individualistic styles. For instance, Sumi (*A Matter of Time*), a married woman moves way beyond socio-cultural hegemony by creating a vibrant world of her own through teaching and writing in the months after Gopal's abandonment.

In their interviews, the authors also make it clear that none of them are partial to being labelled as 'feminist authors'. In an interview with M.D. Riti, Deshpande states: "I never set out to be a feminist writer. In fact, I am very bitter about being labelled as one because it has caused me to be marginalised" (Riti, "Interview : Shashi Deshpande" 2). A 'man-hating' perspective is not present within their fiction. What is clearly observed is the urban Indian woman's strongly emerging voice within the novels. This strength was absent in earlier Indo-Anglian works. Meena Shirwadkar analyses the earlier fictional

works where women characters have been generally described from a male perspective and quotes the critic Joanna Russ:<sup>66</sup>

Culture is male . . . There is a female culture, but it is an underground, unofficial, minor culture, occupying a small corner of what we think of officially as possible human experience. Both men and women in our culture conceive the cultures from a single point of view---the male. (Russ in Shirwadkar)

Deshpande's articulates her irritation with the parochial attitude toward the works of Indo-English women authors:

It is a curious fact that serious writing by women is invariably regarded as feminist writing. A woman who writes of women's experiences often brings in some aspects of those experiences that have angered her, roused her strong feelings.

I don't see why this has to be labelled feminist fiction.<sup>67</sup>

(Pathak 1998 97)

She concludes: It's like saying that when a man writes of the particular problems a man is facing, he is writing male propaganda. Nobody says that. Why is it only said about women writers?"(ibid).

These women writers articulate certain socio-cultural issues which would destabilise hegemonic elements within society, as such writings deconstruct concepts such as man-woman interactions and marriage and loosen their secure and patriarchal moorings within society. This fear and the consequent reaction of the dominant discourse is not merely a feature of Indian society, but of most social discourses. The reaction is particularly strong within civilizations which have a long history attached to them and where the reins of such civilizations are usually in the control of those Gramsci terms the "traditional intellectuals" (see Chapter One). Deshpande's query is provided with a relevant answer by Rey Chow's argument: ". . . it is because 'woman' like the 'minor', offers such an indispensable position in *discourse* that feminists have difficulty claiming 'her'"(110). Speaking of women's place within the dominant social discourse in China, Chow says:

Chinese women, . . . are always said to be as powerful as Chinese men: We keep hearing that they 'hold up half the sky.' If minority discourse, is like all discourse, not simply a fight for the content of oppression it is ostensibly about but also a fight for the ownership – the propriety, the property – of speaking . . . , then Chinese women



are precluded from ownership because it has always been assumed by others in the name of the people, the oppressed classes, and the nation. (111-2)

Chow's argument on suppression of female discourse can be supplemented with Spivak's comment on colonialists, wherein she remarks: ". . . it isn't necessarily bad being white, because to an extent it is what one does with the fact that one's white at this point that's more important . . ." (Spivak 77). The authors in this study appear to use this idea in a different sense. The older generation or the male protagonists of the novels are not sketched in black and white terms merely on the bases of age and gender. The authors express the opinion that it is not an issue of persons being unfair towards others in a subordinate position; it is the discourse itself and the manner in which the individuals use the discourse and the way they manipulate it, which is to be condemned. It would be a fallacy on the part of the audience to make judgements based on sex and generation without taking the operational force of the cultural discourse into consideration. A striking feature of the fictional discourse is that apart from Gopal (*A Matter of Time*) none of the men really question the discourse. But then Gopal himself uses the religious and philosophical discourse of *vanaprastha* (see Chapter One) to evade his responsibilities in order to save himself what he perceives as emotional pain in future.

Earlier generations of female authors tended to subscribe to the male vision, giving female characters in Indo-English fiction stereotypical features. With regard to women writers of the 1950s and 1960s, Shirwadkar claims: "Women novelists seem to be preoccupied with the problem of adjustment. The suffering wife or daughter-in-law is a common figure . . ." (44). She goes on to say:

Middle class girls, their problems after education and in the pre-marriage state or the suffering during the change from the parental family to the family by marriage are the main subjects of study. As education seeped mainly in the upper and middle class girls, these girls express the problems of adjusting the traditional with new ideas. (48)

In this context I also refer to Patrocínio P. Schweickart and Elizabeth Flynn, who discuss the . . . "immasculation" of the woman reader. The prominence of this theme testifies

to the ground-breaking significance of Judith Fetterley's *The Resisting Reader* as well as to the reality of the phenomenon she names. Fetterley points out that everyone, men and women alike, learns to read like a man; that is, to adopt the androcentric perspective that pervades the most authoritative texts of the culture.

(Flynn and Schweickart. Introduction x)

When women, are culturally inducted into reading like men, they also write from an androcentric perspective. This phenomenon is seen extensively in Indo-English fiction of the earlier years, particularly prior to the Women's Movement in the 1970s. Schweickart and Flynn who in turn use the theories of Mary Crawford and Roger Chaffin to further clarify the issue: "Crawford and Chaffin explain that one reason gender differences in comprehension are less apparent than we might expect is that women belong to a 'muted group'. In order to be heard they must learn the dominant idiom and express themselves within its parameters"(ibid xv-xvi). In this context, Shashi Deshpande's questioning of her own earlier narrative style is very relevant:

Why did I have the male 'I'? Did I do it to distance myself from the subject? Or had I done that because I, too, had felt that there was something trivial about women's concerns, something very limited about their interests and experiences? Had I been, without my knowledge, so brainwashed that I had begun regarding women's experiences as second-rate? Had I, too, begun thinking that women's writing was sentimental and emotional, and so having a male narrator helped me to pare down the emotions, to intellectualise it? But, the fact was that both the intellect and the emotions were mine.

(Pathak 84)

Deshpande's comments are substantiated by Chow's assertion:

The common view that women's issues always seem to be subsumed under the 'larger' historical issues of the nation, the people, and so forth is therefore true but also a reversal of what happens in the process of discourse construction. For in order for us to construct a 'large' historical issue, a position of the victim/minor must always already be present. (111)

The novels are not feminist in their condemnation of the patriarchal hegemony, but they are oriented to the woman's perspective. Female solidarity is a clear feature of the novels.

The authors are rather vehement in their assertion of women belonging with and needing each other. In this context, I refer to Divakaruni's ideas in her essay titled "What Women Share":

When I read the epics and other classic texts of Indian culture, I was surprised to find few portrayals of friendship among women . . . . It was as though the tellers of these tales (who were coincidentally male) felt that women's relationships with each other were only of significance until they found a man to claim their attention and devotion. Perhaps in rebellion against such thinking, I found myself focusing my writing on friendships with women, and trying to balance them with the conflicting passions and demands that come to us as daughters and wives, lovers and mothers.<sup>68</sup> (3)

But Divakaruni's celebration of womanhood appears imprisoning in certain ways. It is also very culturally Indian in its discourse with the constant contextualising of relationships within gender. Except for Deshpande's Sumi who moves with ease and grace between the male and female worlds, most writers situate their characters within gender specific locations. A reader might wish to see the women move outside the confines of gender and function purely as human beings. Deshpande is the only one who appears to validate Gramsci's theory of the possibility of creation of new historical power blocs (Morera 103) Ien Ang's comment is pertinent in this context : " . . . given the dominant culture's insistence on the all-importance of sexual difference, we might arguably want to cherish those rare moments that women manage to escape the prison-house of gender"(1996 125).

Within the narratives, women look to other women for sanctuary, while men always fall short of expectations at the crucial moment. Even the younger males like Sunil, Ramesh (*Sister of My Heart*), Mahesh (*The Thousand Faces of Night*), as well as the older generation like Dadda (*Tamarind Mem*), Shripati (*A Matter of Time*) and most others "...conformed to the expectations that society associates with the male sex role"(Doyle, in Atrey and Kirpal 41)<sup>69</sup> as financial providers and do not provide much emotional sustenance beyond that. Sudha looks to Anju in her hour of need and Anju, after her miscarriage and all its accompanying suffering, feels that everything will improve after

Sudha reaches America: "...when Sudha gets here. Everything will be better when Sudha gets here" (Divakaruni 337).

Similarly, Sumi (*A Matter of Time*) returns home to her mother after Gopal deserts them and after Sumi's death, Aru and Kalyani comfort each other. Aru reiterates to the old woman: "I am your daughter, Amma, I am your son"(244). Devi (*The Thousand Faces of Night*) also returns to her mother, Sita, after the failure of her marriage and the end of her relationship with her musician lover: "She straightened her back as she saw the house come into view. She rehearsed in her mind the words, the unflinching look she had to meet Sita with to offer her her love. To stay and fight, to make sense of it all, she would have to start from the very beginning"(139). Men never seem to provide an emotional resting ground for the women, either as fathers or spouses. The authors subvert the traditional discourse by rendering the older male characters as mere patriarchal figureheads, incapable of providing emotional and psychological sustenance. The women emerge triumphant in their support of each other. While cultural discourse stresses male superiority which women are indoctrinated to accept from infancy, the reader moving within a resistant code can discern an inherent knowledge within the women protagonists about female capability in moments of crisis.

But a reader could also come up with an alternative deconstruction of the narrative discourse. In spite of differences in age, most of the female protagonists like Saroja (*Tamarind Mem*), Anju (*Sister of My Heart*), Devi (*The Thousand Faces of Night*) and even Sumi (*A Matter of Time*) ultimately feel emotionally stifled and uncomfortable in the parental home: "We're interlopers, she thinks, my daughters and I. Just passing through" (70-1). A common aspect between these women and their mothers is the complete inner aloneness that they share. This situation is paradoxical within a cultural discourse where a married woman's home and husband are considered enough to satisfy all emotional needs. Yet all women in the novels are aware of this paradox. Devi's grandmother who says: "A woman without a husband has no home" (Hariharan 38) is also the person who remarks: "A woman meets her fate alone" (28), a view advanced in

an interview with Romita Choudhuri, where Deshpande discussed her awareness of the Indian woman's constant aloneness:

Romita Choudhuri: What happens after the precious possessions like comfort, security, harmony etc. all crumble and become meaningless? How can they redefine themselves? On what grounds?

SD: It's not an end. It's a beginning. They've stripped themselves. Seen themselves. bare. One starts from there. It's like rebirth to me.

RC: The women are very alone at their moment of realization.

SD: Yes, very alone. .... This aloneness is the only link between mother and daughter. . . . This commonness. It's so important. So, such a beginning of life is not at all a vacuum. It's full and rich.<sup>70</sup> (Choudhuri "Interview with Shashi Deshpande" 4)

Deshpande is not judgmental on this aloneness. Her protagonists accept it as something inevitable and omnipresent. For Sumi, the knowledge: " 'we are, all of us, always strangers to one another'—becomes part of her"(180).

The texts show that not many characters except Sunil's mother and to some extent Nalini (*Sister of My Heart*) and Saroja's mother (*Tamarind Mem*) stress the superiority of the patriarchal discourse. In the case of Sunil's mother, adherence to the discourse appears more a fear of physical and mental abuse from her husband rather than an innate reverence and respect for the hegemonic discourse. Anju observes her with pity: "When Sunil's father is around . . . she bends her head and speaks in a watery whisper or hunches her shoulders apologetically to fetch what he's shouting for"(Divakaruni 170). In the cases of Nalini and Saroja's Amma keeping within its boundaries provides a comfort-zone from which they do not wish to venture. Saroja feels: "My mother sees herself only as an extension of Appa, refuses to be anyone other than his wife"(Badami 214).

Further resistant reading of the fictional discourse can lead to the interpretation that female suffering is self-inflicted. It could be argued that it is the mother figures who ultimately bring sorrow, knowingly or in ignorance, into their daughters' lives in the process of prioritising the post-Vedic ideal of female chastity.<sup>71</sup> This is vividly illustrated

in the strained mother-daughter interaction between Nalini and Sudha (*Sister of My Heart*). The injustice of her mother's behaviour is not lost on Sudha when Nalini urges the pregnant Sudha to marry her old love Ashok: " 'Come on Sudha, you're not a child anymore. If you'd thought of these things earlier you might not be in this state today.' 'If you had agreed to Ashok's proposal earlier', I think bitterly, 'I wouldn't be in this state today either' " (284). Similarly Gouri, fearing for her own life, rushes Anju into an early marriage, bringing a far more troubled future than Anju would have faced as a single woman. Sita (*The Thousand Faces of Night*) compels Devi into an arranged marriage as does Saroja's mother (*Tamarind Mem*). The women appear so busy circumventing the discourse to serve their own interest that they are ultimately tangled deeper into the snares of hegemony. The reader can question whether while using their offspring as weapons, the mother-figures are somewhat ambivalent regarding the identity of the enemy they wish to defeat.

The novels show the different aspects to the mother-figures. Abha Pishi (*Sister of My Heart*) and Kalyani (*A Matter of Time*) function more as 'participant-observers' than as dedicated advocates of the dominant order. As a Hindu widow, Pishi occupies a unique position of being a mother to the girls' and yet she is not one. It is this element that allows her the objectivity and strength to support Sudha and her unborn daughter. She tells Sudha to discard the false trappings of an unhappy marital state: " 'And you girl', says Pishi, . . . 'go and take a nice bath and shampoo the last of that red from your forehead. The Sanyals are the ones who have lost, not you'" (Divakaruni 262).

Pishi's perspective is unusual in a woman of her generation. Nalini's desire to send Sudha back to her in-laws is more hegemonic, though Nalini is much younger than Pishi. The authors introduce a variety of perspectives within their fiction and each one sparks a fresh chain of questions. According to James Clifford, questions have to be constantly asked about reality, the new world and the various perspectives represented: "People and things are increasingly out of place," he says (6). The ordered set-up of people's lives is increasingly disturbed; their specific spaces have been encroached upon by what they consider to be: "ambiguous persons of questionable origin" (ibid). The last sentence

could be used to explore the attitude of the keepers of the discourse to the ‘in-between-zone’ characters, whose presence forces the former into facing disturbing questions, and challenges their pre-formulated perspectives. So Saroja’s mother would rather label Saroja ‘a disgruntled soul’(Badami 176), in lieu of answering her questions.

The authors use the idea of differing perspectives in order to present the challenges posed by varying memories of people involved. Kamini muses:

In real life . . . ; people went away and returned only as memories. In real life, I reflected, you warmed yourself on cold winter days in a foreign land by pulling out a rag-bag collection of those memories. . . . You reached out to grasp people you knew and came up with a handful of air, for they were only chimeras, spun out of your own imagination. You tried to pin down a picture, thought that you had it exactly the way it smelled and looked so many years ago, and then you noticed, out of the corner of your eye, a person who had not been there before, a slight movement where there should have been the stillness of empty canvas. (Badami 59).

Cultural memory shaped by Hindu mythology and its connected ideologies is a continuous undercurrent within the main narratives. An understanding of the myths from Hindu religious texts and epics is vital to obtain greater insights into the cultural discourse created by the authors. Wendy Doniger O’Flaherty, the Sanskrit scholar and religious historian writes:

Every Hindu myth is different; all Hindu myths are alike. In spite of the deep-seated, totally compelling world-view that moulds every image and symbol, every word and idea of any Hindu myth, in spite of the stress placed upon traditional form at the expense of the individual artist, each myth celebrates the belief that the universe is boundlessly various, that everything occurs simultaneously, that all possibilities may exist without excluding each other. (11)

In the Indian cultural context and the specific Hindu ambience of the selected novels, myths are a key to the undercurrents of meaning within the socio-cultural milieu of the novels. A culturally conversant reader would find it easier to penetrate the meanings the writers intend to convey through the myths. In India, these myths are retold to children as

bedtime stories by the elders. Indian children have these myths and their attached morals incorporated into their psyche from the toddler-stage. Devi describes the mythical tales recited by her grandmother:

My grandmother's stories were no ordinary bedtime stories. She chose each for a particular occasion, a story in reply to each of my childish questions. She had an answer for every question. But the answers were not simple: they had to be decoded. A comparison had to be made, an illustration discovered, and a moral drawn out. (Hariharan 27)

The complexity of the Indian myths prevent unilateral decoding. For instance, in the *Ramayana*,<sup>72</sup> Sita refuses to return to Rama when he asks her to prove her purity a second time. She, the mother of his sons, beseeches the earth for sanctuary and the earth splits open and swallows her. The earth symbolises the ultimate mother figure. In Hindi, the national language of India, the earth is referred to as 'Dharti Ma' meaning 'Earth mother'

Retelling the ancient myths is very much a part of the socio-cultural discourse of child – rearing within India. This highly ritualistic feature of urban Indian society has mellowed with the advent of the modern age but still retains a definite presence within most Hindu households. Myths incorporate the rituals and vice versa, thereby reinforcing the concreteness of the Hindi social structure. For instance, Divakaruni describes the ritual of *Shasthi Puja* and the wait for the *Bidhata Purush*; rituals which have evolved from old Puranic myths:

They say in the old tales that the first night after a child is born, the Bidhata Purush comes down to earth himself to decide what its fortune is to be. That is why they bathe babies in sandalwood water and wrap them in soft red malmal, colour of luck. That is why they leave sweetmeats by the cradle . . . If the child is especially lucky, in the morning it will all be gone. (3)

The reader as cultural insider would use the cultural specificity of the novels to explore certain intricately woven insights within the texts. The novels are often specific to the region they are located in. For instance, Divakaruni's novel is rooted within the Bengali "*Bhadralok*" culture (which will be explained in detail in Chapter Four), whereas *Tamarind Mem* and *The Thousand Faces of Night* are steeped in the ambience of



Brahmin South India. *A Matter of Time* is specifically located within a Kannadiga culture. It reveals the cultural nuances functioning within the Kannadiga Brahmin community which is one of the few Hindu groups permitting endogamy with the maternal side of the family. Thus Kalyani is married off by her mother Manorama to the mother's younger brother, Shripati. The cultural particularities would need decoding by a cultural insider. There is a possibility that such socio-cultural detail as Kalyani's family legend of the miraculous Ganapati idol which appeared in a vision to her father (Deshpande 115-7) might be interpreted as exotic trivia by a reader from a different cultural background. But it would be very parochial to claim that all culturally different readers would possess such narrow perspectives while creating a meaning from their consumption of the text. The reader would probably separate the cultural specifics highlighting the innately Brahminised world of the novels, grasping that it is only externalities that vary within the authorial discourses in creating a social picture of India in their fiction.

As discussed earlier, Trinh's statement (75) goes to the core of the argument regarding cultural insiders/outsideers. No one reader is a perfect cultural insider who accurately and flawlessly penetrates the heart of a particular text. The themes touched upon in the narratives are not merely culture-specific, but they also encompass universal human dilemmas of love, relationships and life in all its myriad aspects. In that sense, cultural outsiders as readers move gradually to the position of cultural understanding as participant-observers.

From the issue of the reader who is a cultural insider we revert to the protagonist as 'cultural insider/outsider'. Within Divakaruni's text, it is possible to view Anju as a cultural outsider. But she is also very much an insider. There is in her a constant questioning of all the value systems and traditions governing their daily lives as children and later her doubts and anger regarding marriage and the inadequacies of post-marital life. From a traditional Indian perspective, Anju is very much an outsider because she has not learnt the fine art of adjusting, prevaricating and manipulating. This is a feature she shares with some of the female protagonists like Gourima, Sudha, Abha Pishi (*Sister of My Heart*), Sumi and Aru (*A Matter of Time*). A certain manipulation of other people

and the family's social discourse are considered vital to the survival of a conventionally reared Hindu girl in family situations and the world at large. The authors have placed their younger protagonists at variance with this cultural dominant. Given the suffering and obstacles faced by the more forthright of the female protagonists, the reader can be left wondering if the authors intend Indian women audiences to decode the texts as a warning against excessive assertiveness and honesty. For instance, Anju is often angry at what she perceives as restrictions and lack of understanding on the part of others, entering the novel with the statement: "Some days in my life I hate everyone"(Divakaruni 269).

Within *Sister of My Heart*, Anju's culturally alien rage is mirrored in Sunil's anger towards his father and Sudha's towards her mother. The other texts also express instances of this filial anger which is an aberration within the dominant culture systems. Saroja (*Tamarind Mem*), Devi (*The Thousand Faces of Night*) and Aru (*A Matter of Time*) at different points in time, experience a great sense of anger towards and betrayal by a parent. In common with Anju, Aru too feels abandoned by her father. Anju's expression of this rage is emphatic:

Most of all when I allow myself to think of him, I hate my father. I hate the fact that he could go off so casually in search of adventure, without a single thought for what would happen to the rest of us. I blame him for the tired circles under mother's eyes, the taunts of the children at school because I don't have a father. None of it would have happened if he hadn't been so careless and got himself killed.

(Divakaruni 11)

Within an Indian traditional cultural situation, such thoughts would be tantamount to blasphemy in the context of family loyalty. But the writers portray the inadequacy within the cultural discourse itself which it has failed to convince these protagonists, who on the whole, are spirited and honest individuals. The characters mentioned above are very much those occupying the 'in-between-zones' within the discourse. Through them, the authors convey the improbability of any individual functioning solely as cultural insider and ultimately as spokesperson for a selective discourse. To enforce that label on a person is ultimately a subjugation of the person's own ideologies to those of the vested

interests, taking away the precious possession of the subject's own voice. Trinh T. Minh-ha's argument is undeniably powerful:

An insider can speak with authority about his/her own culture, and s/he is referred to as a source of authority in this matter -- . . . as an insider merely. This automatic and arbitrary endowment of an insider with legitimized knowledge about his/her cultural heritage and environment only exerts its power when it is a question of validating power. It is a paradoxical twist of the colonial mind: what the Outsider expects from the Insider is, in fact, a projection of an all-knowing subject that this Outsider usually attributes to himself and to his own kind. In this unacknowledged self-other relation, however, the other would always remain the shadow of the self, hence *not-really-not-quite* "all-knowing. (69-70)

Sudha and Sunil (*Sister of My Heart*) are both cultural outsiders in their own ways. They are not always willing to bend with the sanctions imposed on them. Sudha appears quiescent till her unborn daughter is threatened. But then she takes the bold step of dissolving her marriage. Within Indian social norms it is a disastrous mistake, but Sudha, wiping away her vermilion<sup>73</sup> refers to her decision as "washing away the death sentence that was passed on my daughter"(263). Where Sudha finally comes into her own as a character posited within an ambiguous cultural zone is when she chooses to join Anju in America rather than marry her old love Ashok. The decision is prompted by her strong desire never to depend on anyone for her own security or that of her daughter. She is very clear: "I am going for Anju, yes, and for Dayita, but most of all I am going for me"(ibid 309).

Like Anju, Sunil dislikes his father. His hatred for his father is apparent and verbalised. Father and son are openly antagonistic toward each other. But being a male, Sunil's life in America has afforded him the chance to be free of his father's presence. Sunil's desire for personal space, privacy and his unwillingness to share all aspects of his life with family members render him different from others of his particular indigenous social group. The cultural ideal prevalent within Indian families is to lead intertwined and complex lives. A reader privy to such cultural details will understand that in most cases the concepts of privacy and reserve are ignored within family ties and it is considered

almost ill-mannered not to pry into each other's lives under the guise of excessive caring and concern.

Kamini (*Tamarind Mem*) has followed parental injunctions and social conventions in her pursuit of qualifications, but where she moves beyond them is in her denial of the need for marriage. Atrey and Kirpal explain: “. . . for the woman marriage also represents the ultimate goal of her existence”(99). But Saroja is a much more of a cultural outsider than Kamini in her adulterous affair with an Anglo Indian mechanic. She, as a Hindu Brahmin woman and an officer's wife, has broken all regulations governing the highly ritualized Indian family and social life. Saroja is perhaps the most ambiguously located character. She is quite open in her distaste for her marital life. Kamini recalls her parents' marriage: “Their arguments were loud and made no pretence of secrecy”(Badami 31). Though she has been frustrated within the marital relationship, she urges Kamini to follow her footsteps, thereby revealing the sway exercised by the discourse. Saroja also appears somewhat hypocritical as all her transgressions are committed within the security of being the ‘railway memsahib.’ The latter part of the novel finds her adopting the ancient Hindu religious tradition of the travelling mendicant. Saroja at times appears the most confused by the dichotomous pull of the highly gendered social systems. Saroja and Gopal (*A Matter of Time*) both discard intense family ties. But unlike Gopal, Saroja does not abandon the duties of the householder midway. She fulfils them to the best of her abilities before turning to a form of asceticism.

The dilemma caused by the pressures of cultural traditions as observed in the character of Saroja is also visible within Gourima, Sudha (*Sister of My Heart*), Sita (*The Thousand Faces of Night*) and most others. Deshpande's creation of Sumi veers away from this norm of character-construction. Sumi is mostly clear about her placement within the social structure; what worries her is how others view that placement because her personal tragedy is such that: “None of the stock phrases, none of the comforting formulas fit”(20). The factors of consensual control constantly operate within the lives of the protagonists. Morera argues: “Although Gramsci does not explicitly assert it, it is nevertheless suggested that moral rules are adequate or right to the extent that they

further the well-being of all human beings”(120). In the light of this argument, the novels clearly portray the main cultural discourse as detrimental to the interests of the marital relationships of the protagonists and especially the women.

In a modern Indian arranged marriage it is not unusual for a couple who are barely acquainted with each other to have sexual relations on the very first night after the wedding. It is an accepted norm and certain authors have portrayed in different styles this vital aspect of the urban Indian arranged marriage. Badami's description of Saroja's initial sexual encounter with her husband would probably be more difficult for a Western reader to accept than a model reader from a common cultural environment. The hegemonic discourse is a subversion of the rational attitude of the ancient days where the man-wife relationship appears to be devoid of the element of inhuman indifference. Basham discusses the refined approach to marital sex as recommended in the *Kamasutra*:

Vatsayayana recommends that a man should at first refrain from intercourse, until he has won over his bride and gained her confidence, for women, being gentle by nature, prefer to be won over gently<sup>74</sup> . . . Vatsayayana then gives a detailed example of the courtship of a newly married bride by her husband, which would win the approval of most modern psychologists. (1967 173)

Saroja's first sexual experience with her husband is almost terrifying in its silent callousness and lack of feeling. In her later years, she recalls the morning after her wedding night:

I remember the soundless love-making of the night and wonder that my body neither thrills nor cringes at the memory. Perhaps this is because all that I can recall of the experience is my fear and my husband's merciless quiet, his hands moving over me without any tenderness. (Badami 199)

To her husband, she functions less as a person than a mere body. Nevertheless, he is simply behaving in accordance with the hegemonic code observed by Indian Hindu males of his generation.<sup>75</sup> In some respects such norms still exercise a hold. Showing affection for a young bride immediately upon marriage is not considered seemly on part of the husband. Sudhir Kakar comments on the impact of culture on the psychosexual aspects of the Indian arranged marriage: “A mental absence of satisfaction can exist where there is

no lack of normal sexual intercourse . . . Cultural injunctions can . . . increase the conflicts around sexuality, sour it for many and generally contribute towards its impoverishment” (1990 21). The authors illustrate the manipulations of the vested interests functioning within the dominant discourse, which in order to strengthen patriarchal mores have subverted the traditional scriptural injunctions. The latter are only cited when their use validates patriarchal mores within the social system.

As discussed earlier, Indian scriptural injunctions entreat husbands to care for and cherish their wives in many ways. Apart from providing the wife with material luxuries and emotional support, the scriptures enjoin the man to ensure his wife’s satisfaction as well as his own in the course of lovemaking (Altekar 60). The sexual discourse as depicted by Badami, however, poses a challenge to the cinematic discourse, which as I have already shown, acts as medium of the hegemonic ideals. Rakhi in the 1975 film *Kabhie Kabhie* loves one man, but marries another. In the morning after her wedding night with her new husband, she is shown bursting into peals of laughter signifying sexual satisfaction. The socio-cultural discourse as caught between popular culture, traditional ideas and those in practice, often presents a confusing medley for the participant observer. In this case, cinematic discourse lays stress on the ultimate happiness achieved by submitting to parental decisions. But an interpretive community within the audience may read Rakhi’s behaviour as evidence of the fact that she was not so much in love with a person as the notion of love itself. Therefore her fantasy of romance was easily fulfilled by a romantic sexual encounter with her husband, another handsome and good-natured young man.

The reader functioning as participant observer would strongly empathise with protagonists such as Sita (*The Thousand Faces of Night*), Saroja (*Tamarind Mem*), Anju and Sudha (*Sister of My Heart*) and Sumi and Gopal (*A Matter of Time*) who are not pale reflections of societal conventions, but are characters who have been created with the ability to verbalise and concretize their own emotional needs at least with themselves. These characters can be considered participant-observers, because each in their own way has stepped outside the confines of their world and taken a comprehensive if subjective view of their surroundings and circumstances.

The circumstances of urban Indian women's lives are quite restricted in spite of often living in a situation of financial security and all material comforts. Such restrictions may often appear ridiculous or meaningless to a reader unaware of the narrow confines of socio-cultural traditions (sometimes clearly defined, sometimes a mere carry-over from old customs), which structure urban Indian family lives. These families, and especially the women, are trapped by modes of respectability and tradition as well as the need to maintain social status. Usha Kumar observes: "Indian women of the twenty first century are poised for a change but it will require a keen observer to detect these changes in the inner world of the Hindu woman" (157).

Upper middle class urban Indian women do not possess an outlet for venting their frustrations even through means such as foul language or violence which are permissible for uneducated women from a lower socio-economic stratum. It is noticed that an earlier socio-cultural discourse permitted these freedoms even to upper caste women (who otherwise suffered severe restrictions). The language used by Saroja's Putti Ajji (or grandmother Putti) in describing her husband and his lower-caste mistress vividly illustrates this point. She screams her contempt for her husband from her terrace: ". . . son of a whore, fucking an untouchable piece of flesh. Even a pariah dog will not sniff that woman and my fine husband goes to her"(Badami 216).

It appears as if Westernised education has acted as a muffler for the original spirited voice of the Indian woman. A bondage has been imposed on their essential right to express themselves in earthy terms as females. Having been accorded the privilege of education, they have been deprived of the prerogative of being vocal women. This freedom of articulation possessed by the older generations is commented upon by Deshpande during her interview with Choudhuri: "Sometimes women's language can be surprisingly uninhibited. Especially with women of a previous generation. They would use the kind of words which we, middle-class women today would shudder at"(21).

The cultural world of the novels portrays to some extent the frustrated circumstances of the women's lives. Lack of sexual fulfilment and a gap in emotional and verbal

communication appears to lead the protagonists, particularly the older women, to different forms of neurosis. Most of the male protagonists find an outlet for pent-up frustrations in their work related duties which they use as escape-routes, whether it is Sunil and his software skills (*Sister of My Heart*), Dadda and his railways (*Tamarind Mem*) or Mahesh and his stolid executive's job with all the attached material benefits (*The Thousand Faces of Night*). This phenomenon is not specifically Indian in context – what is Indian is the refusal to recognize and rectify the situation by moving outside its bounds and starting anew. The characters of Ramesh and Dadda in particular, express this characteristic vividly as do female protagonists such as Nalini or Mrs. Sanyal. Vibrant characters such as Aru, Charu, Hrishi (*A Matter of Time*) or Anju and Sudha (*Sister of My Heart*) are portrayed as seeking answers to break the knot created by these tangled and manipulative discourses. But the overall pace of social change within the novels remains slow. Usha Kumar remarks: “The Indian temperament is not inclined toward revolution but rather toward gradual long-term transition” (157).

In the women protagonists of the earlier generations, the neuroses manifest themselves in various ways. For instance, Sita channels her frustrated musical talent into trying to ruthlessly shape the lives of her husband and daughter regardless of their desires: “She could and did, rule with an iron hand. She thought for all three of them; and when she could do so without offending propriety, she acted for them, swiftly, decisively, and above all, unobtrusively” (Hariharan 105). In the same novel, Devi the confused woman is foreshadowed in Devi the awkward girl whose elusiveness frustrates Sita. In case of Nalini (*Sister of my Heart*) a frustrated young bride turns into a nagging wife and then a domineering, manipulating, widowed mother who is unable to freely love her daughter and ultimately pushes her only daughter into a loveless marriage. But many daughters would decode correctly those discourses dominating Sudha's decision to fall in with her mother's wishes:

To my mother, her life must have seemed like a trick of moonlight. One moment her arms were filled with silvery promises. The next she was widowed and penniless. Alone in a world of glowering clouds except for a daughter. Words were all she had to save herself and her child . . . Does she believe, as perhaps all mothers do, that through her daughter she can redeem her life? . . . . A bird may escape a cage built of hate, of the



desire for power. But a cage built of need? Of love's darkness? (77)

Sudha's thoughts reveal the force of the consensual control systems. She has not clearly understood her mother's techniques of manipulation. The encoding and decoding in the mother-daughter interaction have taken place along divergent lines of thought. The portrayal of the Indian parent-child relation with its common pattern of dominance and subordination will be easily decoded by a reader who may be a participant-observer. Hariharan's Devi and Divakaruni's Sudha and Anju are all diverse personalities, but share the common factor of being girls ready to inevitably surrender to parental, especially maternal control always cloaked in excessive love because they have been denied a proper exposure to the outside world. Model readers will bring in their own cultural awareness to bear on the textual interpretation. Crawford and Chaffin

Observe that two factors influence the schemata that are activated during reading: "background" (education, upbringing, life experiences) determines the prior knowledge the reader brings to bear on the text; "viewpoint" (what she expects to learn from the text, what she believes about the author's intentions, and what she imagines to constitute proper reading and the language in which the reading is to be articulated, and so on) determines the reader's disposition toward the text and the activity of reading. Differences in viewpoint can override similarities in background, and differences in background can be masked by similarities in viewpoint.

(Schweickart and Flynn Introduction xv)

Sudha appears to decode her mother's need for domination as a form of love. In the transmission of messages, the receiver as consumer has interpreted the message in a particular manner. The audience interpretation will also vary given individual perspectives, but no reader will find it possible to take a completely neutral stance. Clifford's study is valuable in this regard where he discusses the discursive forms of ethnographic writing and cites Jeanne Favret-Saada who argues that,

The event of interlocution always assigns to the ethnographer a specific position in a web of inter-subjective relations. There is no neutral standpoint in the power laden field of discursive positionings, in a shifting matrix of relationships of I's and You's.

(42)

Reverting to the cultural discourse, an explanation can be sought for the tendency of most protagonists to accept parental domination and interference to unreasonable limits. The psychoanalyst Stanley Kurtz discusses what he terms the 'Durga'<sup>76</sup> complex' within the Indian child rearing discourse. He states:

In spite of the special relation between a mother and her own children in regard to feeding and physical contact, the rules of propriety in the joint family lay considerable stress on the need to moderate this connection and associate the child with the entire group of mothers. (143)

Using Kurtz's idea, the reader could argue that Sudha, Anju and others were often oblivious to maternal manipulations as they craved recognition as individuals from the mothers. Anju and Sudha had been mothered by three women; but the one to one bonding between individual mother and daughter was rarely prioritised and this also leads to the obsessive bond between the cousins. Devi (*The Thousand Faces of Night*) has been excessively mothered to fulfil Sita's ambitions; Saroja's (*Tamarind Mem*) unhappy marriage occupied her mind above all else and Kalyani (*A Matter of Time*) was in a similarly pathetic marital relationship. In all cases, the children exhibit signs of neglect and a need for parental approval. In the texts: "the child, as a unique individual seems almost not to exist" (Kurtz 50).

Some other instances of female neuroses encapsulated within the cultural world of the fiction are seen in Kalyani's readiness to assume responsibility and blame herself for what she perceives as the failure of her daughter's marriage:

'I know she was careless', she says, 'I know she didn't bother too much about her home, But, Gopala,' and now she hesitates, 'how could she have known what being a good wife means when she never saw her mother being one? I taught her nothing, it's all my fault, Gopala, forgive me and don't punish her for it.' (Deshpande 47)

They are also seen in Saroja's adulterous relationship with an Anglo-Indian mechanic who is in every way outside her socio-cultural milieu. The Indian literary critic, M. Rajeshwar comments on the urban Indian women protagonists in the modern Indo-English novel:

Indian women, in view of their limited freedom and insular mode of life have

shown for ages a marked tendency towards growing introspective which is a prelude for neurotic reaction. This sort of feminine sensibility has a close relation to neurosis at least in the Indian context. Neurosis almost always results from a compulsion to repress one's feelings and desires because they are not in consonance with the accepted norms of society. Women are mercilessly denied opportunities for open expression of their true feelings in the tradition-bound Indian society. In this respect and in many other respects they are at a great disadvantage when compared to men. (9)

The authors in this study explore various facets of the female neuroses discussed in the above statement.

Divakaruni and Badami are expatriate authors and Deshpande and Hariharan are authors who are cosmopolitan in their lifestyles, but all their fiction universally depicts situations specific to the urban Indian culture. One such feature of the novels is the ubiquitous presence of servants. Ramur Ma and Singhji (*Sister of my Heart*) are servants whose lives are entirely intertwined with those of their employers and they also have an assured place in the social scheme of life. They are in their own way cultural insiders. They are also privy to employers' confidences. Linda Ayah and Ganesh Peon (*Tamarind Mem*) employed by the Indian Railways to serve officers' families, consider themselves superior to the Anglo-Indian Paul D'Costa, who is a mechanic. D'Costa's racial heritage renders him unacceptable to most Indian communities, including the Christian Indian servants who consider him a half-breed Hindu. Servants entwined within the family life are an important source of interference. Servants like Linda Ayah prefer D'Costa keeping away from their domain. Linda Ayah is angry about Saroja's involvement with D'Costa as it violates the structures of the social discourses:

Any attempts at blurring the dividing line between outsider and insider would justifiably provoke anxiety, if not anger. Territorial rights are not being respected here. Violations of boundaries have always led to displacement, for the in-between zones are the shifting grounds on which the (doubly) exiled walk. (Minh-ha 70)

Characters such as D'Costa and Mrs. Anderson are almost total cultural outsiders, yet they are uniquely trapped within the discourse as those who are perceived as 'complete' or 'born' insiders. They are shunned and were termed 'chee-chees' during the Raj, of

which they were a creation. The poignant situation of Anglo-Indians in India was perhaps best seen in John Masters' novel *Bhowani Junction* (1954) and the 1982 film *36 Chowringhee Lane* directed by the Bengali filmmaker Aparna Sen. Masters' novel and Sen's film both illustrate the comment of the Indian literary critic M.K. Naik who asserts: "How does the Eurasian in Anglo-Indian fiction view himself?: mostly as one confused, frustrated and bitter; perpetually insecure and unsure of himself; and forever cursed to carry a large-size chip on his half-white shoulder"(60).<sup>77</sup>

The inclusion of such fictional characters highlights the diversity and conflict of Indian society. The divide is sharp and not always verbalised and practised as a matter of course, being an accepted hegemonic social code implicitly understood by the model reader. According to the literary theorist Wolfgang Iser, without interaction between the reader and text, the literary meaning would not really come to fruition (this corresponds with Fish's ideas as well as Hall's). The reader as participant-observer brings out the inner meanings of the text through the meaning she /he creates: "In reading we think the thoughts of another person . . . our selections tend to be first guided by those parts of the experience that still seem to be familiar"(Iser 126). The reader as participant-observer finds herself traversing the writer's world and it is the text that will guide the reader's perspective in spite of the individual concrete images imposed by the reader's particular conditioning and psychological make-up: "The text is neither expectation nor memory, the reader must put together his wandering viewpoint"(135). Iser puts greater responsibility on the reader, stating that "successful communication depends on the creative ability of the reader"(107).

In an interview with Arthur J. Pais, Divakaruni asserts:

Good literature crosses all boundaries ---- I have believed in this as a reader and as a writer. While South Asian readers can identify with my characters with ease, for the rest, I hope my books have provided the means to discover another world--- and find out that despite different cultural values and traditions, humanity is the same all over the world....I am convinced about the universal appeal of human experience that is convincingly rendered and I have great faith in the intelligence of readers.<sup>78</sup> ("Interview: Chitra Divakaruni" 28 October , 1999 3)

A culturally alien reader might experience some difficulty in sorting out the intricacies of the master-servant relationship within Indian cultural discourses, for instance, the fixed subordinate-dominant relation with regard to master and servant and the liberties allowed the latter. Ramur Ma (*Sister of My Heart*), for example, sleeps on the kitchen floor but has the right to give gifts of silver to the newborn Dayita and chastise Anju and Sudha as children. Similarly, Linda Ayah (*Tamarind Mem*) will always sit on the floor and simultaneously berate her employer for the latter's illicit relation with Paul D'Costa. Mayamma, the so-called old servant, is literally the mistress of the house in Hariharan's novel. She may sleep in the kitchen, but Devi, the daughter-in-law is afraid to function in the kitchen for fear of offending Mayamma, and all family members allow her to dictate certain household rules to them in their own house. Servants are an essential feature of Indian life. Most urban Indian households, even moderately wealthy ones, employ a minimum of one servant. The fiction depicts a common feature of Indian social life in which servants have a culturally specific role to play, frequently portraying an earlier discourse with regard to servant-master relationships. There is something almost feudal in Ganesh Peon's and Linda Ayah's commitment to their jobs and their masters as is Mayamma's attachment to her master's household. The servants take up their jobs for economic purposes, but from their subservient status they attain a hegemony of their own within the master-servant discourse. This hegemony helps them attain a particular position within the social system. Morera claims: "The concept of hegemony can be studied from the point of view of class developing from a mere economic existence to its hegemonic function through the state"(190).

Another important aspect of Indian culture, as discussed in Chapters One and Two, is the overwhelming importance of the mother, especially the mother of sons. The reader has to understand the presence of the traditional cultural norms which provide the basis and support for the manner in which a mother like Mrs. Sanyal exercises control over her sons. During Sudha's bride-viewing ceremony, Anju observes: "Mrs. Sanyal's good at control. I can see it in the way she handles her entourage . . . It is very subtle: a glance here, a little cough there . . . ." (Divakaruni 114). It is also observable in Sita's (*The*

*Thousand Faces of Night*) control of her daughter. With regard to this aspect of Indian family life, Kakar states:

In daughterhood an Indian girl is a sojourner in her own family; and with marriage she becomes less a wife than a daughter-in-law. It is only with motherhood that she comes into her own as a woman and can make a place for herself in the community and in the life cycle. This accounts for her unique sense of maternal obligation and her readiness for practically unlimited emotional investment in her children. (1981 82)

Fictional works of earlier novelists incorporate the patriarchal hegemonic code extensively. Women were taught from the beginning to read as men and they also wrote as men using extensively the male perspective as discussed earlier. The model reader can place herself/himself within the fictional situations and follow easily the changing Indian authorial perspectives. With regard to women's studies and writings on women, Rey Chow remarks:

For the first time in Asian history, perhaps, we can identify a visible group of scholars, largely women, whose work centers on women. And yet the spotlight on "women" in our field seems also to make the shape and sound of the enemy more pronounced than ever. I use "enemy" not to refer to an individual but to the attitude that "women" is still not a legitimate scholarly concern. Depending on the occasion, this enemy uses a number of different but related tactics. The first tactic may be described as habitual myopia: "You don't exist because I don't see you." The second is conscience-clearing genitalism:<sup>79</sup> "Women? Well, of course! . . . But I am not a woman myself, so I will keep my mouth shut. " The third is scholarly dismissal: "Yes, woman's issues are interesting, but they are separate and the feminist approach is too narrow to merit serious study." The fourth is strategic ghettoization: since "women" are all talking about the same thing over and over again, give them a place in every conference all in one corner, let them have their say, and let's get on with our business. These tactics of the enemy---and it is important for us to think of the enemy in terms of a dominant symbolic rather than in terms of individuals, that is, a corpus of attitudes, expressions, discourses, and the value espoused in them---are not limited to the China field. They are descriptive of the problems characteristic of the study of non-hegemonic subjects in general. (100)

The model reader as stated earlier is a vital part of the entire reading process and the existence of the model reader finally shapes the fiction in a concrete manner and style. The books that I am analysing are within the financial and intellectual grasp of the individuals I would designate as model readers. The target audience in the case of the selected fiction would most commonly be women. Men, particularly urban Indian educated males, mostly are wary of such fiction where they see themselves from what they might perceive as a totally female perspective, such a gaze usually leaving them with a sense of discomfort. I recently encountered a well-qualified established male reader in his fifties whose comment on the fiction of recent women authors of Indo-English fiction was that they were unnecessarily and incessantly harping on the theme of the “so-called disadvantaged Indian woman.” This comment lends further substance to Schweickart’s and Flynn’s comment:

For men, reading women’s stories means confronting themselves reflected in the eyes of women---they must endure the gaze of the other. Thus, it is not only a matter of depriving women of the self-enhancing readings men claim for themselves, but also of avoiding the alienating readings that they have allotted to women. With textuality firmly in male hands, men never have to face the risks inherent in genuine reciprocity.

(Introduction xix)

But gendered reading poses a threat of trivialising women’s issues to the extent of rendering them negligible. This has most recently been seen at the International Festival of Indian Literature at Neemrana in India where Sir V.S. Naipaul’s blatantly rude reaction to the works of Shashi Deshpande and other women writers was condemned by Deshpande. Sir Vidia called Deshpande’s reference to gender equality a banality. Deshpande retorted saying: “To me, exile and the anguish of exile is a non-issue, it is banal.”<sup>80</sup>

The male reaction to women’s literary voices often appears one of fear. The men seem to dislike the idea of entering the mind of the women to understand the text. As Trinh explains: “However, “to put oneself into someone else’s skin” is not without difficulty. The risk the man fears for himself as well as for his fellow-men is that of “going over the

hill” (67). The fear that seems to exist in the male mind is that of losing power over the majority discourse.

A reader from a different culture, upon reading the selected fiction, might wonder why such tension oriented marriages as those between Kalyani and Shripati (*A Matter of Time*), Devi and Mahesh (*The Thousand Faces of Night*), Sunil and Anju (*Sister of My Heart*), Saroja and Dadda (*Tamarind Mem*) are not dissolved through divorce. The model reader who is a cultural insider and to some extent a participant observer will easily grasp the hegemonic code operating within the fiction which decrees that endurance is the foundation for marriage and divorce can never be a solution in social terms. The Hindu marriage between a couple is supposed to endure for seven lifetimes. Usha Kumar states that “marriage continues to be a lifetime relationship for an overwhelmingly large number of couples”(151). The discourse is not oriented toward seeking individual happiness in any way; it is first and foremost a discourse of acceptance. Of her marriage with Dadda, Saroja analyses how “A person grows on you like an ingrown nail. You keep cutting and filing and pulling it out, but the nail just grows back. Then you get used to the wretched thing, you learn to ignore and even become fond of it” (Badami 243).

An important interpretive community is that of women. But novelists probably hope for a more discerning community of readers, men and women who will read within the texts, instances illustrative of the dangers posed by those who are intimate insiders, yet are also outsiders to a marriage. The male readership should not dismiss these novels as women’s books and should not interpret them merely as tales of patriarchal tyranny. That would be too simplistic and narrow a perspective. This fictional world encompasses a social reality that exists within the urban Indian discourse. The functioning of vested interests taking advantage of every instance of discord between newly married couples is visible within the narratives. For instance, had Anju and Sunil shared a harmonious friendship within their marriage could the problematic family situations have escalated to the extent that they eventually do?



In this chapter the cultural world of the novels have been explored in conjunction with the idea of the model reader. The model reader and the protagonists have been considered both from the angles of cultural insiders as well as cultural outsiders. The model reader has also been looked at from the perspective of the participant observer. The concept of the interpretive community within which the model reader functions has also been explored. It is clear that the model reader belonging to the interpretive community would decode the fictional discourse in a culturally specific manner. But it is to be remembered that this interpretive community of readers would have variations in their interpretations owing to various personal factors and discourses influencing them. India is a country containing under the banner of “Indian culture”, a cocktail of many diverse cultures and often certain culture codes within the different novels are very community specific. Caste is another important factor influencing the authorial interpretations and the actions of the protagonists. The issue of caste in relation to the fictional discourse will form the basis of the next chapter.

A highly relevant feature of the novels that emerges upon analysis is the great psychological and emotional strength attributed by the authors to the women protagonists. In spite of their diverse problems, they emerge with the inner core of their selves intact. They pick themselves up and go on. The theorist Juliet Blair’s analysis is revealing in this context:

There is here a conceptual space for a woman which may be called the ‘interior’ as opposed to the ‘exterior’ body. .... With his superior strength, man can—metaphorically – lift a woman onto a pedestal, or rape her in the gutter. The physical circumference limiting the position of women remains, so to speak, determined by the radius provided by the length and strength of a man’s arm. But what he cannot reach and what he does not have access to, is this interior region.<sup>81</sup> (214)

Gopal glimpses the inherent female strength in both Aru and Kalyani as he prepares to depart after Sumi’s death:

*It is the steady watchful look on their faces, the smile of encouragement they have for him that makes them look alike.*  
*‘If it is indeed true that we are bound to our destinies, that there is no*

*point struggling against them, even then this remains – that we  
do not submit passively or cravenly, but with dignity and strength.  
Surely, this, to some extent, frees us from our bonds?’*

*A Matter of Time (246)*

## Chapter Four: The Caste Factor

*'Devi,' Baba said, 'wherever you are, remember you are a Brahmin. You may not know it, but underneath that skin flows a fine-veined river of pure blood, the legacy of centuries of learning.'*  
*The Thousand Faces of Night (52)*

Caste consists of four groups or 'varnas' into which Hindu society has been divided since the Vedic Ages. In the traditional sense, they are the Brahmins (the priest-scholars, highest on the rungs of caste hierarchy), the Kshatriyas (the group from which were drawn the warriors and kings), the Vaishyas (the traders, merchants and such others) and on the lowest rung the Shudras (who undertook all menial tasks). Caste structures were initially occupation-based, but such norms have long vanished: "In India this stratification grew more rigid . . . with a dominant fair minority striving to maintain its purity and supremacy over a darker majority"(Basham 1967 138).

In the third century B.C, Megasthenes (a Greek traveller to Pataliputra<sup>82</sup> and ambassador from the court of Seleucus<sup>83</sup>), documenting Indian socio-cultural systems, made observations on the caste-system:

It is not permitted to contract marriage with a person of another caste, nor to change from one profession or trade to another, nor for the same person to undertake more than one, except he is of the caste of philosophers, when permission is given on account of his dignity.<sup>84</sup> (Ghurye 1-2)

Vast changes have taken place since those times and even the caste-dominated Hindu society of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries has greatly altered. But certain features of the ancient system have remained constant even if they are not always strictly observed. The Indian historian G. S. Ghurye observed in 1932: "castes were groups with a well-developed life of their own, the membership whereof, . . . was determined not by selection but by birth"(2). The contemporary Hindu is born into a caste membership, but the changing socio-cultural milieu does not automatically ensure status in a society where wealth, education and other such factors now are of immense importance, sometimes far outweighing caste status. Ghurye discussed caste hierarchy as a fundamental feature of the system: "Everywhere in India there is a definite scheme of social precedence amongst

the castes with the Brahmin as the head of the hierarchy”(6). This hierarchical aspect of the system still exists without the great importance attached to it in earlier times especially in urban India. Restrictions on feeding and social intercourse as practised in earlier times, are almost impossible to maintain in urban Indian society, with people living in close proximity to each other.

Badami’s novel placed in the 1960s and 70s portrays this social inter-mingling between Dadda, a Hindu officer and working-class Christians. But Saroja’s reactions reveal the intrinsic caste prejudices. She also realises the uneasiness experienced by the Christian guests at the Masseys’ party: “They flock around the room, talking in hearty voices, uncomfortable with a Hindu officer and his prim-mouthed wife in their midst”(219). She also cannot help revealing her own parochial attitude to a ‘cultural outsider’: “I resist the impulse to snatch my daughters close to me, watching to make sure nobody gives them any of that cake, it has brandy in it for sure. I hate this house with its ponderous furniture from another era, . . . .”(220).

In modern India, one’s class standing has taken on greater significance relative to one’s caste position by birth. Broomfield’s analysis of the ‘*bhadralok*’ class of Bengalis (a socio-economic class created initially by British imperial policies) illustrates the point. Broomfield writes: “The advantage in the use of the Bengali word *Bhadralok* is that it emphasises the attribute which was most important to the members of the group themselves – their social honour”(13-14). Broomfield further clarifies :

the use of the word underlines the cardinal fact that this was a status group . . . , not an economic or occupational class. A man did not become a ‘*bhadralok*’ simply by achieving a given level of wealth or securing certain employment. Nor did impoverishment or unemployment automatically deprive one of *bhadralok* status, provided certain values were maintained and certain social proprieties observed.(14)

In the everyday conversation of the contemporary Bengali, the term *Bhadralok* often occurs when the speaker wishes to place another person within a clearly defined social status.

The sociologist Murray Milner states: “Marriage is the time that the family is most under pressure to display its status, and is also the time that caste boundaries are most important. Marriage is typically allowed only within one’s own local caste group or an allied caste of relatively similar status”(60). The authors analysed here locate their fictional narratives within the boundaries of this social structure. In the novels under analysis, the marriages are primarily within caste and community. Anju and Sudha (*Sister of My Heart*) are Bengali Brahmins of the *Rarhi sreni* or subcaste (as denoted by their surname ‘Chatterjee’) and they marry Ramesh and Sunil, who are also Bengali Brahmins (see Chapter Three). Their surnames indicate their caste status. Ramesh’s surname is Sanyal. He is a Brahmin from the *Barendra sreni* or subcaste. Intermarriages between these sub-castes have been in practice for decades, as each considers the other to be of equal standing, especially in urban India. But given the extreme conservatism exhibited by Mrs. Sanyal as well as Nalini, Sudha’s mother, it surprises a culturally conversant reader that the alliances on either side were not considered within the same sub-caste. Sunil’s surname is Mazumdar, which in itself is a title.<sup>85</sup> It means that he could be taken for a Hindu Bengali from the Kshatriya or Vaishya varnas or groups, but the fact that his father comes forward to negotiate a marriage with the Chatterjees and has earlier been considering an alliance with a family named Bhaduri (Divakaruni 132), makes Sunil’s caste-status clear. He too, is a Brahmin, otherwise neither the Chatterjees nor the Bhaduris who are *Barendra* Brahmins would have entertained the initial proposals.

Restrictions on marriage are the only aspects of the caste system widely observed amongst most caste groups even in contemporary urban India. According to the theorists, Mary Searle-Chatterjee and Ursula Sharma, even in cases of marriage, many urban Indians prioritise qualifications, financial status, appearance and other such factors:

A widespread interpretation of the modern role of caste is that it is only a significant determinant of behaviour at the point of marriage. Restrictions on eating and drinking with, let alone touching, people of low caste are certainly rendered meaningless in many urban contexts by the close proximity of anonymous strangers in buses, city streets, office canteens. A quick glance at the matrimonial advertisements in any newspaper reveals that even in marriage, caste is only one consideration among many . . . For a minority of advertisers caste may even be less important than these other considerations,

and a union with a spouse from a different caste is acceptable provided the status gap is not too conspicuous and other requirements are fulfilled. (17)

But within many traditional yet modern urban Indian families, endogamy can be considered as the most vital ingredient of the caste-system. In some form or another, with regard to marriage, Indian caste and community groups are not eager to cross time-honoured boundaries. Crossing of such boundaries signifies pollution within the group structure, which is in itself a disruptive factor. The anthropologist Mary Douglas discussing the concept of pollution with regard to Hindu socio-cultural systems analyses: “A polluting person is always in the wrong. He has developed some wrong condition or simply crossed some line which should not have been crossed and this displacement unleashes danger for someone . . .”(114). Douglas goes on to discuss the threat to the highly organized fabric of a social structure through the occurrence of what is ritually considered polluting: “. . . though we seek to create order, we do not simply condemn disorder. We recognise that it is destructive to existing patterns; also that it has potentiality. It symbolises both danger and power”(95).

Caste endogamy ensures the alienation of the outsider. What is ironic within this social system of arranged marriages is the hostility to the new bride who is brought in as cultural insider, but then excluded as family outsider or intruder. She is usually on the periphery of an already tightly knit group as has been shown in Chapter Three. This is clearly illustrated in Divakaruni’s portrayal of Mrs. Sanyal’s treatment of Sudha. Sudha is: “the keeper of the household, its many cupboards and pantries, trunks and storerooms” (179), she is handed all keys to the household “except the double-locked Godrej safe which holds the money and the wedding jewellery”(ibid). Hegemony dictates that complete independence and power even in household matters is never given to a young bride. It would disrupt the systems of patriarchal dominance. Sudha concurs in this, stating: “I do not mind” (ibid). The ideological force of consensual control is clearly in operation. As the Gramscian theorist, Carl Boggs observes:

Gramsci’s definition of ideological hegemony was therefore rather broad. It encompassed the whole range of values, attitudes, beliefs, cultural norms, legal precepts, etc. that to one degree or another permeated civil society, that solidified the class

structure and the multiple forms of domination that pass through it. (160)

Caste, as we know it today in India has been influenced by colonialism. The divisive factionalism within caste structures has been fostered by imperialists and colonisers to obtain greater administrative clout and the caste based society in contemporary India was firmly established during colonial times. Contemporary caste structures stem not so much from Sanskritic Brahminism as from the colonial ideologies. This factor has also been responsible for the politicising of caste in present-day India and the meteoric rise of unscrupulous politicians, whose origins lie in the lower stratum of the caste hierarchies. The factionalism inherent in Indian society further burdens the existing structure. Beteille states:

Caste proved to be much more obdurate than it was judged to be. Perhaps the will-power was not adequate to the task of its removal or containment. But we can also say now , . . . that there was a basic misperception of its strength among Indian intellectuals. (1996 154)

Gramsci's comments on the historical burdens within European civilization can be aptly used to describe caste and status burdened Indian society:

This past history has left behind a heap of passive sedimentations produced by the phenomenon of the saturation and fossilization of civil service personnel and intellectuals, of clergy and landowners, piratical commerce and professional . . . army. (Forgacs 277)

In the novels, parents use caste as a hegemonic factor in controlling the lives of their offspring. The manner in which the marriages of the protagonists are arranged clearly illustrates this. None of the elders move outside the traditional boundaries while negotiating marriage for their children. Keeping the caste/class group intact appears far more important compared with individual happiness. Saroja's sterile marriage to Dadda (*Tamarind Mem*) is an example in point. Keeping within the hegemonic dictates of caste boundaries is the over-riding principle dominating the manner in which parents organize their children's lives; specially the lives of daughters. The sociologist Leela Dube's observations support this argument:

The emphasis on arranged or negotiated marriages and the proper organization of space and time for young girls after puberty derive their justification from this concern with boundary maintenance, which means the maintenance of the ritual purity of caste.<sup>86</sup>

(12)

According to Searle-Chatterjee: “For many people, particularly of the ‘higher’ castes, religious and caste identities are rooted in the socialisation of early childhood. In this sense, they can be called primordial”(149). The authors provide numerous insights into this aspect of caste and status identity. Aunt Vijaya’s family stories inculcate a sense of pride in her lineage within Kamini, then a mere child: “ ‘I come from a line of Brahmins,’ I thought proudly, ‘poor in worldly goods but rich in knowledge’ ”(Badami 71). A similar pride in the documents outlining the history of the status and achievements of her ancestors, is also visible in Kalyani, otherwise a subjugated and humiliated individual. Her son-in-law Gopal notices that “Kalyani believes implicitly in the document. To her, the men are what the document says they are – heroic, generous, learned, saintly” (Deshpande 95-6). This rich tapestry of ancestral history is also woven into Gopal’s love for Sumi: “After hearing Kalyani’s family history, he could never look at Sumi without seeing the subterranean stream of the past running under the clear runnels of her young girlhood; the honeycomb texture of her being was for Gopal, soaked in her family history” (94).

The anthropologist Levi-Strauss in his study of totem and caste points out that caste is a feature of well organised societies. He writes: “We have become used to ... thinking of caste as a feature of highly developed sometimes even literate societies”(113). In the novels, the Hindu protagonists, in spite of their education and urbanised lifestyles, are firmly rooted within their own highly organised caste and community structures. The authors capture the aspects of caste-maintenance in small nuances within their daily domestic routine. For instance, Dadda does not eat ‘jhinga’<sup>87</sup> as he considers it a “low caste person’s supper” and “tomato, a non-Brahmin vegetable”(Badami 237). Levi-Strauss’s ideas are further strengthened by Douglas’s observations. Douglas comments: “Social rituals create a reality which would be nothing without them. . . . ritual is more to



society than words are to thought. . . . it is impossible to have social relations without symbolic acts”(63). The negative aspects of this ritualism in daily life is observed in the sterility of the lives of widows such as Abha Pishi (*Sister of My Heart*) who always: “sits in the back of the hall on feast days, not participating, because widows mustn’t” (11-2). The positive aspects of this feature of Indian society are seen in joyous acts such as festivities marking childbirth. Kamini recalls Chinna’s tales:

My great-grandmother, Putti, marked the arrival of her first grandchild by inviting the entire town for the naming ceremony. She had every doorway decorated with mango-leaf garlands of beaten silver, and she even bought a cradle carved by the cradle-makers of Ranganathapuram. She gave silk saris to all the female relatives who came . . . . (Badami 13)

These rituals provide a base upon which individual and family identities are constructed and consolidated. They are also pathways for blending into larger social communities. As Douglas says: “ritual focuses attention by framing; it enlivens the memory and links the present with the relevant past” (65).

The innate sense of caste superiority is verbalised clearly by Devi’s father-in-law, “‘Devi,’ Baba said, ‘wherever you are, remember you are a Brahmin. You may not know it, but underneath that skin flows a fine-veined river of pure blood, the legacy of centuries of learning’”(Hariharan 52). The old man is quoting the Hindu scriptures outlining the ideal Brahmin. It is an ideal quite distant from the urban Brahmins of contemporary India and the Brahmin protagonists within the fiction. For centuries, this ideal has existed undisturbed within the Brahmin mind. The Indian psychoanalyst Sudhir Kakar draws on the observations of Abbe Dubois, a seventeenth century French travelling missionary to describe the Hindu Brahmin’s orientation of mind:

the Brahmin’s superiority is inherent in itself, in himself, and it remains intact, no matter what his condition in life may be. Rich or poor, unfortunate or prosperous, he always goes on the principle ingrained in him that he is the most noble, the most excellent, and the most perfect of all created beings, that all the rest of mankind are infinitely beneath him, and that there is nothing in the world so sublime and so admirable as his customs and practices.<sup>88</sup> (1996 212)

Dubois's observations are supported by the study of sociologist Murray Milner. Milner comments on the Brahminism as a concept which is omnipresent even in the mind of educated and urbanised individuals. He discusses Brahmins as a group:

The Brahmins had another genius: they rejected the notion that ritual purity required renunciation and lifelong otherworldliness. While they adopted many of the characteristics of ascetic renouncers, the key social position in the Brahmanical synthesis was the twice-born householder. . . . the genius of the Brahmins was combining a highly regulated and esoteric lifestyle, which gave them an inalienable religious status, with a legitimate opportunity for many of their members to have significant control over the crucial resources in an agrarian society – land and labor . . . . A more accurate way to say this is that power based on religious status was fundamental – in the sense that it was the core of the Brahmin's identity, both for himself and others. (69)

He emphasises their shrewdness in achieving an ongoing maintenance of status, analysing the means used by them: “. . . a highly elaborated lifestyle, emphasizing ritual purity, was nearly impossible for outsiders to copy or appropriate”(ibid).

Milner's perspectives on Brahmins as a social group offer deeper insights within the fictional context which clarify the specific location of the protagonists within the urban Hindu social milieu. The Brahmins adopted the position of the scholars and intellectuals within Hindu society. This image helped them dominate the masses ideologically. Hariharan's sketch of Baba, Devi's father-in-law, goes on long way in revealing the subtle yet consistent hegemonic control of the patriarchal Brahmin male. He has created the persona of a gentle and benign patriarch which contains another aspect – that of a controlling Guru laying down socio-cultural guidelines for the young daughter-in-law. Had he been a truly liberated intellectual being, it is improbable that his own wife would have sought freedom in the form of renunciation. He is, in every sense, a traditional intellectual serving vested hegemonic interests. The Brahministic social dominance can be better understood in the light of Gramscian theory: “. . . intellectuals carry forward the most elaborate and mature expression of the prevailing traditions, culture, and moral values; they impart a sense of historical purpose to social activity; and they erect an ideological defense of particular class interests”(Boggs 221).

In middle-class Indian households, inter-caste marriages are not greatly welcomed and inter-religious marriages, even less so. Usha Bambawale claims that “a Hindu is born into a caste and leaves it only at death”(4). She goes on to say:

A Hindu is also made aware of the barriers in social transactions. The caste rituals and rites are observed through *Sanskaras*. Thus, Hinduism as a religious system and caste as a social system are almost indivisible.

The caste is a large unit, the kin group therefore, becomes the custodian of caste rules, each reinforced by the other. .... The institution of marriage concerned not only the couple, but also the extended group. It was thought that mate selection involved the coming together of two families rather than two individuals. (5)

This aspect of Indian culture is seen in the rejection of Ashok's marriage proposal by Sudha's mother and aunts (Divakaruni 115). Ashok is of a lower caste and it would be considered traditionally incorrect for him to seek an alliance with a woman of higher caste. It does not even come within the system of hypergamy practised by the Hindus in earlier times. With regard to hypergamy, Dumont states:

In this pattern, a slight status difference, a slight inferiority of the wife's family in relation to the husband's, is considered normal and does not in the least affect the offspring's status. Of course, this relates to the principle of marriage and in no way excludes endogamy. (116)

Acceptance of the non-Brahmin, Ashok's proposal by the ultra-conservative Chatterjee family, would have signified the onset of disorder within the caste hierarchy they strive to maintain. In this case, the Chatterjees have not even taken Ashok's family's material wealth and his educated background into consideration. This is the most tradition bound and overtly negative aspect of the caste system. Giving a daughter to a lower caste family would symbolise for the Chatterjees, a tainting of their lineage and pollution within the socio-cultural structure. Mary Douglas concludes: “Females are correctly seen as, literally the entry by which the pure content may be adulterated”(127).

Innate hypocrisy is a feature of the hegemony-bound Indian society. It is a society which condones Rayaru's (*Tamarind Mem*) relationship with a lower caste woman, as the

hierarchical structure of patriarchal dominance is tolerant on this issue. Hypergamy maintains the patriarchal hegemony. The issue here is not so much maintenance of caste status as securing dominance within the social framework. The Gramscian theorist, Carl Boggs explains:

Gramsci observed that ruling elites always sought to justify their power, wealth, and status *ideologically*, with the aim of securing general popular acceptance of their dominant position as something “natural,” part of an eternal social order, and thus unchallengeable. (161)

The tensions generated by inter-caste and inter-religious marriages resemble the hostility faced by intruders into a tightly knit group, be it a tribe, caste, religious community or such other groups. Such hostility is also faced by those group members who violate boundaries laid down by highly organized factions such as caste groups. Moving on to the issue of caste boundaries, how and on whom they are imposed, thus leads to a study of characters who function within caste boundaries within the novels and those that step outside the boundaries and yet manage to retain their place within the caste hierarchy.

Mary Douglas strongly emphasises the importance attached by Hindus to the ideas of purity and pollution. As discussed earlier, the woman is regarded as the point of vulnerability regarding the onset of pollution within a securely organized group. Douglas asserts:

Since place in the hierarchy of purity is biologically transmitted, sexual behaviour is important for preserving the purity of caste. . . The caste membership of an individual is determined by his mother, for though she may have married into a higher caste, her children take their caste from her. Therefore women are the gates of entry to the caste. (126)

Linked to womanhood at any stage is the constant upholding of the ideal of female purity in spiritual and physical terms. The novels explore the notions of female purity within the urban Indian social structure. The above mentioned aspects of caste bound societies comprise an instrument for acquiring a stranglehold on the lives of daughters and complete parental dominance over every aspect of their lives. The purity expected of

young girls is again an instrument dedicated to the service of hegemony. Dube provides further socio-cultural insights regarding the framework of beliefs and practices amongst Hindus:

This framework rests upon a clear demarcation of phases of life with respect to female sexuality—a special ritual value accorded to virginity, the ritualization of puberty and special care accorded to pubescent girls, a glorification of the married state and motherhood, . . . . (13)

The young Saroja is socialized in this discourse by her mother: “Decent girls don’t go to the movies alone or with boys. Decent girls spend their time at home learning to cook” (Badami 218). The authors portray the lack of progress within social mores by citing the exploring the similarities in the lives of Saroja as a teenager in the 1950s and the teenage Anju and Sudha in the 1980s. Sudha recalls:

Anju never stopped fighting: ‘Why must Ramur ma go with us every time we leave the house, even to get books from the neighbourhood library?’ she’d ask. ‘Why can’t we go to Sushmita’s birthday party when all the other girls are going, instead of sending a gift with Singhji?’ (57)

The reluctance of different caste groups to forge an alliance with a member of another group is also visible within the novels. Their main means of doing so is by imposing various restrictions, especially on the women of the group, the supposed sources of danger. The higher the caste, the greater usually are the restrictions on female members. For instance Saroja (*Tamarind Mem*) Gourima (*Sister of My Heart*), Sita (*The Thousand Faces of Night*), Kalyani (*A Matter of Time*) are all Brahmin women who face enormous restrictions within the patriarchal discourse. Saroja wishes to qualify as a doctor and faces family hostility to her ideas, especially from her parents. She is instead advised to get married. Her plea to her mother: “Why can’t she allow me a chance to create my own shade instead of sheltering under somebody else’s?” (Badami 162) is never considered worthy of reflection by parents labouring under the hegemony of a caste and status regulated social structure.

What is left unstated is the vested interest of parents in getting the daughters off their hands. A daughter appears a mere burden in the Indian socio-cultural situation in the time

frame of Badami's tale: "A woman without a husband is like sand without the river"(158). Saroja's youth is located in the more socially conservative India of the 1950s. Individual happiness is seen disappearing in the need for socio-cultural appeasement. When matrimonial proposals arrive, Saroja's mother says: "First tell me does he have all his wits and all his limbs, then tell me his kula-gothra"(165).

In the narratives, patriarchal hegemony is constantly observed shackling the female protagonists within the stranglehold of a rigidly organised discourse. Sita's (*The Thousand Faces of Night*) talent and possible earning capacity as a musician are thwarted by a discourse that regiments the life of a good daughter-in-law. She plays second fiddle to an inept husband trying to build a corporate career for him (102-5). The author delicately portrays the irony of the situation in which Sita is obviously so much more capable than him; but pursuing any career would be unthinkable for an upper caste woman of her generation. So she attempts to make her husband reach that desired zenith of her ambitions. She succeeds to a great extent in a relatively short period of time: "Mahadevan (fifteen years, after all, is just a small chunk of a successful life), became a full-fledged Sahib, a Brahmin among Brahmins (pure blood and a healthy bank balance) . . ." (104). Here again the link between occupational and caste status emerges clearly. In contemporary India, caste alone does not ensure an absolute location within the socio-cultural sphere. The outer trappings of a successful career linked to qualifications also emerge as highly important in securing a valued place in the social hierarchy, as well as providing opportunities for suitable matrimonial alliances.

Hariharan evokes the frustrations of the urban Indian woman who in spite of possessing high levels of intelligence is, in traditional and mythological terms, always secondary to the male. This is the contradiction inherent with Brahminic Hinduism as a religious doctrine. Woman is *Shakti*, the female principle and power personified, and yet she is always inferior to Man.<sup>89</sup>

But contemporary Brahminism is dedicated to the maintenance of hegemony, and is in a sense less confusing and ambiguous than its more ancient forms, in whose rich

philosophies originate all contradictions. The reasons for the contradictions within ancient Hinduism could possibly lie in its non-discriminatory character which, with the passage of time changed into a rigid and discriminatory discourse. Altekar illustrates this: “On his return from a journey the father used to recite a prayer (mantra) for the welfare of his daughter just as he did for the happiness of his son”(10).<sup>90</sup> It is this ancient form of Brahminism with its ability to raise dangerous questions which might disturb the hegemonic social structure, that Sita (*The Thousand Faces of Night*) wishes to shield Devi from by sending her to America:

There she would become a good Brahmin again, in the wholesome rays of a scientific, antiseptic sun that did not hint at dimensions beyond face value. There the darker monsters of the Brahmin world – the gods, the ambiguous myth—would fall back into a less dangerous, better-lit perspective. Devi would learn that she had to use these monsters, not allow them to overwhelm her with lying dreams of blood, paradisiacal palaces and women turning into men. (106)

Gourima (*Sister of My Heart*) is also a very capable woman, burdened with the responsibility of carrying on the illusory illustriousness of the Chatterjees. She has to run the failing bookshop, maintain the crumbling family mansion and also bring up her daughter Anju and niece Sudha in a style suited to the daughters of an old and renowned family. She has also the added responsibility of looking after her widowed sisters-in-law, Abha Pishi and Nalini. For many years, she is unable to take the financially sensible step of selling the family mansion with its valuable land to a ‘Marwari’<sup>91</sup> businessman. She ultimately does so upon Abha Pishi’s insistence after the breaking up of Sudha’s marriage, further inspired by Sudha’s pregnancy. When the mansion is sold, Sudha reflects on it as “the end of era, of a lifestyle”(268). With that step Gourima appears to set herself and her sisters-in-law free from the bondage of traditional caste and class bound hierarchy.

But Gourima’s adherence to caste and class hegemonies is ironic in the face of her obvious capacities and intelligence. The ideology of the dominant discourse is so deeply ingrained within her that she appears unquestioning of the unnecessary burdens laid upon her by the unthinking measures of an inconsiderate husband. Though Gouri attempts to

build the family finances and provide for Anju to the best of her ability, she is still moving within a class based ideology. As Pishi says, Gouri is “the clear-eyed one, fooled by little” (29); but unwilling to alter her fundamental principles which actually serve the vested interests of an uncaring society. Gramsci’s theories validate this argument :

[ Gramsci ] realized that the erosion of ideological hegemony was only a necessary but never a sufficient precondition for fundamental change; demystification of the old class and power relations would not automatically give rise to new forms of critical consciousness. (Boggs 165)

Gouri is educated and values education enough to place the girls at the best convent schools. But she does not hone her discerning intelligence to a point where she encourages and supports the creation of a new social order within the home, based on critical consciousness. She has undergone a stressful marriage and widowhood, with most of her dreams unfulfilled; but she still functions within the hegemonic discourses on marriage. She values Anju’s intelligence, but is trapped in the hegemony of being ‘one of the Chatterjees’. She does not see Anju as just her daughter, but a daughter of the Chatterjees (57-9). So she is willing to sacrifice Anju’s personal happiness to maintain the dominant discourse of the Chatterjee traditions. In modern, urban India, Gouri is an anachronism stuck in the old definition of caste and class.

In contemporary India, the distinct lines between the terms ‘caste’ and ‘class’ appear rather blurred at times. The distinction between blue-collar and white collar jobs are sharper than ever before and within the rapidly expanding Indian middle-class, there is far greater distance between a clerk in a government office and the IAS (Indian Administrative Service) official of the same caste than there ever would have been in the pre-1947 era. The sociologist Andre Beteille is clear that caste is not a uniformly and legitimately constraining factor for all members, given the differences in education, wealth and other such factors in urban India amongst a specific caste group. Beteille further clarifies this with examples, referring to the urban middle class in particular. He also rebuts the idea that the educated and Westernised upper middle class Indian does not form a part of what is considered as authentic Indian society and culture:

I wish to emphasise that the class or stratum that I am talking about, whether



conceived broadly or narrowly, does not comprise a mere handful of individuals, and that socially, if not demographically, it is a very important part of contemporary India.

. . . What needs to be stressed as much as the social significance of the class or section in question is its great social diversity in terms of language, region and religion---- and what is as important, in terms of wealth, occupation and education. Limiting ourselves only to professionals, there is all the difference between a senior member of the Calcutta or Bombay bar and a small-town advocate; or between the research scientist in the Indian Institute of Science and the science teacher in a mofussil<sup>92</sup> college.

(1996 152)

It has been pointed out earlier in this chapter that the marriages between the fictional protagonists are mostly caste compatible marriages. Even in contemporary society, the rigid rules of the upper castes entail loss of caste status with a daughter of the family marrying out of caste. For instance, within the 'Kulin Brahmins'<sup>93</sup> of Bengal, a family lost its 'Kulin' status only if a daughter of the family opted for an out of caste marriage. This leads to a situation of disorder within the caste group, and such disorder is deeply and socially disturbing to the entire fabric of the caste-group. Mary Douglas analyses the impact of disorder and the importance of ritual in maintaining order within a group and the social fabric:

Disorder by implication is unlimited, no pattern has been realised in it, but its potential for patterning is indefinite. This is why, though we seek to create order, we do not simply condemn disorder. We recognise that it is destructive to existing patterns; also that it has potentiality. It symbolises both danger and power.

Ritual recognises the potency of disorder. In the disorder of the mind, in dreams, faints and frenzies, ritual expects to find powers and truths which cannot be reached by conscious effort. (95)

Sudha's leaving her husband's home creates disorder in the tightly bound social structure valued by her mother. This disorderliness in turn poses a challenge to the hegemonic social systems due to its inherent potentiality to become powerful. Sudha's action challenges the hegemony put in place both by her mother, as well as Mrs. Sanyal, both of

whom are in different ways keepers of patriarchy. Divakaruni portrays Mrs. Sanyal and Nalini as symbols of extreme Indian conservatism of an earlier era in urban India. They almost seem to exist in a time warp in the novel's chronology which is located in the eighties. Nalini does not even believe in letting Anju and Sudha have a look at the proposals from prospective grooms (104). Mrs Sanyal hegemonic conservatism takes on a terrorising aspect as she refuses to consider Ramesh's sterility as a medical problem and insists on Sudha propitiating the goddess of fertility. Sudha describes this: " 'Pray, Natun Bau,' says my mother-in-law. 'Pray to the goddess for a son.' She is still holding onto my wrist. Her nails bite my flesh, and her lips move feverishly all the way to the shrine of the goddess of childbirth"(223).

The changing face of the Indian socio-cultural milieu can be seen through characters such as Sumi, her daughters Aru, Charu and Seema (*A Matter of Time*), Kamini, Roopa (*Tamarind Mem*) and even Sudha and Anju (*Sister of My Heart*), because these women break with the time-honoured tradition of considering marriage as the most important factor of their lives. Kamini rejects the idea of marriage altogether and goes to Canada to pursue her doctoral studies, and Roopa moves to America after eloping with an eligible Indian man. In urban modern India, neither of Saroja's daughters becomes a social outcast. The portrayal of the modern cultural situation is a subversion of the traditional cultural discourse.

But both these acts irk Saroja, who believes that neither of her daughters has followed the right path of Indian womanhood because they have not undergone proper socially approved arranged marriages. This again is ironic, as Saroja has spent most of her own life regretting her sterile marriage. In fact her frantic attempts to save her dying husband amaze Kamini who wonders "why was she fighting for a life she had spent so many years cursing?" (Badami 140). But all Saroja is doing is appropriating power. As Douglas states: "Cursing and blessing are attributes of authority"(106). The author also draws upon the Hindu woman's fear of widowhood. Kamini understands: "She had wanted to die first, as a *sumangali*,<sup>94</sup> with her marriage beads about her neck, the vermilion bright on her forehead. Dadda wasn't playing fair by falling ill, threatening to leave before

her”(139). In spite of the strength of her personality, overstepping boundaries by her liaison with an Anglo-Indian mechanic, Saroja is still rooted in the contradictory dominant ideologies of her upbringing.

But a culturally aware reader would also discern that Saroja is trying to stay in control of her household simply by caring for her husband. She has been reared within a traditional Indian cultural discourse where attaining the status of wife is more important than nurturing the individual relationship. The woman’s power stems from the presence of the husband. Saroja belongs to an older generation which internalized these norms.

Most protagonists follow aspects of Brahmin values in their quest for education. The influence of the discursive ideology functions in all spheres of life. If one aspect of the ideology is subverted by the youthful protagonists, they move within other boundaries of the discourse. There is never a complete rejection of the theories dominating their specific status groups. Brahministic hegemony dominates through means of consensual, usually not coercive, control. Boggs’s analysis supports this argument:

The point was that no social order could sustain itself over the long run primarily on a foundation of organized state power, that on the contrary the inclination of a ruling class to rely upon repression and violence was a sign of *weakness* rather than strength. What contributed to real political durability was the scope of popular support or ideological consent. (159)

For instance when protagonists such as Anju, Sunil (*Sister of My Heart*) and Kamini (*Tamarind Mem*) seek their independence, they do so within a very brahministic discourse. They use education to gain a measure of independence. They function rightly on the assumption that learning will feed and nurture them as it did their ancestors.

The most significant change lies in the fact that being unmarried and educated, girls such as Kamini do not lose their place within the social group. They have moved undoubtedly into the category of in-between zone characters, but have still retained a vital segment of their identity as cultural insiders. Caste combined with class status within the changing urban milieu assures them a certain security in socio-cultural terms.

When Sumi's husband leaves her and their daughters, she moves back to her natal home. But it does not appear to affect her social status within her social circles. She is not shunned by society. She faces questions and her daughter Aru is very angry and resentful (Deshpande 31); but in no way are they shown to acquire an untouchable status. For instance, Sumi has her family offering support and does not stop receiving invitations to family gatherings. She even meets Gopal at a family function (106). The strongest reaction comes from Sumi's mother Kalyani who considers herself responsible for the ending of her daughter's marriage and who blames herself for imagined transgressions on her daughter's part in the role of a wife: " 'I taught her nothing' , says Kalyani" (47).

But within the fiction, urban Indian society appears to have changed sufficiently to accommodate the change in circumstances within a marriage without ascribing pariah status to the women. The authors use these women to show the difference family support can make, especially maternal support. Sumi's home reaches out to embrace her. Kalyani blames herself, never Sumi, but Nalini (*Sister of My Heart*) blames Sudha. The cultural discourse within the novel extends beyond the portrayal of mere traditional responses. The author offers a feeling of hope through Kalyani's support toward Sumi, a subversion of the hegemonic culture of constant criticism and oppression of the daughter's individualism by the mother.

It should also be noted that the response of families is based on qualifications. Most of Sumi's family members are far better educated than Sudha's family members. Neither Sudha's mother nor mother-in-law has had access to education as an aid to broadening her socio-cultural perspectives. But again, Divakaruni's portrayal of Abha Pishi interrogates this idea as Pishi appears more liberal than all others. Equally it could be concluded that Pishi has a love of learning. She has sought education and been denied, yet she does not possess the ignorant arrogance of either Mrs. Sanyal or Nalini.

Gramsci "argues that in Europe, and specifically in Italy, there is a large parasitic class of individuals without an essential function in the productive world, whereas this stratum of 'producers of savings' does not exist in the USA. . . . What is common

to all of them is that they consume and save, but they are not active in economic production.” (Boggs 144)

Here Gramsci helps us understand how the status group is occupied by individuals like Bijoy (*Sister of My Heart*). Such individuals strengthen caste/class-hierarchies by transferring the burden of their ideologies on to family members who are dependent upon them, literally or figuratively. Therefore when Bijoy takes in Gopal as his cousin brother and finances his rash money-making schemes, Gouri and Abha Pishi who are in the traditional sense, Bijoy’s dependants as wife and sister, are unable to protest at the foolishness of the acts. After all, hegemonic Hinduism places a male sibling far above consideration in comparison to wives and sisters:

Ideas and opinions are not simultaneously ‘born’ in each individual brain: they have had a center of formation, of irradiation, of dissemination, of persuasion—a group of men, or a single individual even, which has developed them and presented them in the current form of political reality.<sup>95</sup> (Boggs 209)

But ironically, it is Gouri who bears all the burdens of Bijoy’s hidebound ideologies. When Anju and Sudha graduate from school, she holds an expensive function. Anju says:

as with everything in our house, it has to be done right . . . The gilt-edged invitations were sent weeks ago and the gilt-edged responses have been carefully counted. The formal hall has been dusted and aired and new candles put into the chandelier. Aunt N. has had the heavy silver dishes from great-grandfather’s time polished . . . My mother has to handle the hardest task of all; buying a gift for each guest, something small (that is all our family budget allows) yet elegant, for that’s how the Chatterjees always thank visitors for their good wishes. (87)

In her desperate efforts to keep alive the hegemonic ideals of her dead husband and his ancestors, Gouri does herself great harm as seen in her heart attack later that night (99). Her later decision to listen to Pishi’s practical advice and sell the ancestral mansion is instrumental in keeping her alive. But such good sense takes its own time to develop even within the sensible Gouri: “Gramsci insisted that the transition from common sense to good sense, from spontaneity to critical consciousness, must emerge neither directly out of the social reality of productive relations nor out of the moment of cataclysmic ‘explosion’ ”(Boggs 209).

But the narrative discourse portrays a greater move towards critical consciousness on Gouri's part as she discards the outer trappings of hegemony. Unlike Nalini who has completely internalized the patriarchal discourse, she supports Sudha's decision to leave Ramesh and also sever the engagement to Ashok. Sudha prioritises Dayita's needs and Gouri provides the emotional support Sudha needs. Devi (*The Thousand Faces of Night*) is another protagonist who along with a wisdom based on critical consciousness faces the disillusionment of life and romantic fantasies. This heightened consciousness leads Devi to a critical inner search. Her return to Sita is deliberate. It is herself she has to face as much as her mother. The reader understands that the journey to self-discovery and rebuilding of life and relationships will not be easy for Devi. Completely subversive reading may also lead to the analysis that Devi who appears essentially weak returns to lean on Sita for support as usual. Divakaruni's Sudha is yet another protagonist who reaches the understanding that she cannot live for others until she consciously begins to live for herself outside the bounds of hegemony.<sup>96</sup>

These novels are placed within urban India in the last quarter of the twentieth century. Caste as a factor appears trivial within everyday life, yet assumes vast relevance when it comes to the issue of marital alliances. The characters in the novels, especially the men, do not lead segregated lives observing caste rules; they are not concerned with whether or not any act such as crossing the ocean to go overseas<sup>97</sup> leads to transgression of caste boundaries. They use only one significant means to maintain caste status: like many educated modern Indian youth they seek a spouse within caste. Usha Bambawale commenting on caste observes:

It is responsible for the religious manifestations of the values and norms of the group. Stratification among Hindus is a religious and social scheme. Its rigidity is both a socio-cultural and religious arrangement. A Hindu is born into a caste and leaves it only at death. He, therefore, has a definite place on the social ladder. This solidified caste structure involves the most extreme form of status hierarchy. (4)

For instance, Mahesh (*The Thousand Faces of Night*), Sunil, Ramesh (*Sister of My Heart*), Dadda (*Tamarind Mem*), are all educated professionals with well established

careers. When it comes to a matter of marriage, they prefer to opt for arranged marriages, keeping in line with caste endogamy. Even caste hypergamy is not considered viable to maintain a good social standing. The authors do not appear to take extremely strong stands on the negative or positive aspects of such arranged marriages. They tell their tales and open avenues for the reader to explore and form a judgement. Their expertise lies in awakening the readers' critical consciousness. The writers are Indian, and after all arranged marriage in that discourse is a fact of life that is existent and not always negative. What mainly appears to concern them is the constant sacrifice of personal happiness and relationships on the altar of caste and class-dominated systems establishing the hegemony of extended family interests over the need of the young couples to forge marital bonds.

Susan Bayly, a theorist and historian, refers to this caste-based marriage system within urban educated Indian families, most of whom typically employ the means of matrimonial advertisements in the leading English and regional dailies in order to find the appropriate match within caste and class. Bailey provides further insights into this complex system of matchmaking, describing their strategies as :

moves made by the many members of India's expanding middle classes who arrange matches for their educated sons and daughters by advertising in the classified matrimonial columns of India's vernacular and English language newspapers . . . Those placing these items include many non-Hindus, but in the most widely read anglophone dailies the great majority identify themselves as Hindus for whom the matching of caste and sub-caste (*gotra*) in marriage is a major priority. This is done by those of high or 'clean' caste, as well as those at the bottom of the varna hierarchy. (314)

Amongst the Hindus in particular, the arranged marriage is very much the norm. Horoscopes<sup>98</sup> have a critical role to play in such a search, leaving it open to widespread exploitation and manipulation. They further the caste-system and arranged marriage within the dominant cultural hegemony. A horoscope can be used as a point of exploitation by the astrologer-priests, as well as the natal families on either side because horoscopes can be made to suit marital requirements on either side, for a financial

consideration. Devi refers to their family astrologer as a “protégé” of her great aunt (Hariharan 15).

Divakaruni and Hariharan illustrate the contradictions inherent within the Indian social systems. The families of Anju and Sudha as well as Devi have educated daughters. But in the case of matrimony they revert to horoscopes as a final resort. Gourima promises Anju that she will marry her off to a man who will let her study further, and then consults astrologers to match horoscopes. Sita also goes through these rituals prior to arranging Devi’s marriage. There is a constant dichotomous pull between the dictates of education and the old systems of the hegemonic discourse. Even Saroja’s father, an educated bank-manager, treads the time-worn paths of caste rules and traditions. Saroja recalls: “My father had an unshakeable faith in the priest, who, he believed, carried the wisdom of ancient sciences in his head” (Badami 203).

Bayly has herself illustrated the hegemony of caste and class dominance with examples of matrimonial advertisements of the mid-1990s from leading English metropolitan dailies. That this practice has undergone no change is seen from very recent matrimonial advertisements in leading newspapers.<sup>99</sup>

Hariharan’s novel also refers to the qualities specified within these advertisements and their fixed place in the culture of contemporary Indian arranged marriages. When the Srinivasans come to view Devi for their scientist son, they stress that their Westernisation is only external and the son too wants a Brahmin bride who, as Devi observes should be ‘prepared to adjust’ (17). The catch here lies in the word ‘adjust’. The contradiction in the cultural system is that in marital situations in urban India, educated girls are sought, and yet they should be willing to follow caste bound dictates; thereby bolstering the codes of patriarchal hegemony.

Altekar writes: “The Initiation Ceremony (*upanayana*) of girls used to take place as regularly as that of boys at the normal time. This was the case as early as the Indo-Iranian age” (237). Caste hegemony slowly stripped women of their rights (Altekar 237-40). In modern times, women connive at the domination of their own kind and ultimately



married couples fall into the error of abetting the destruction of their own married life. Ramesh and Sudha, Anju and Sunil (*Sister of My Heart*), Mahesh and Devi (*The Thousand Faces of Night*) and Saroja and Dadda (*Tamarind Mem*) are married couples whose lives illustrate the above argument. Dube observes:

Caste both imposes constraints and creates the dominant ethos which underlies the practice of dowry within Hindu society. The increasing social and economic differentiation within an endogamous unit, traditional or currently acceptable, in terms of ownership of resources, income and professions has led to severe competition amongst parents of marriageable daughters. This has led to higher demands and expectations on the part of the groom's family. (17)

Divakaruni's fiction clearly outlines the stress faced by upper-middle and middle class Hindu families because of the dowry system. In modern India, amongst educated upper caste families, demands for dowry are never overtly expressed. Trying to anticipate, and satisfy them, causes enormous tension and upheaval in the bride's family. Anju's statement is filled with the indignation of a young girl at the unfair hegemonic control accorded to the bridegroom's family within a highly unfair socio-cultural tradition:

Dowries are a slippery issue, I have come to learn. A good bridegroom's family never demands a particular amount of money, or a certain list of items. That would be too gauche. And so the bride's party has to anticipate their wishes and go beyond them, because if they don't, it might affect their daughter's future. (102)

The most tragic aspect of the dowry system is apparent when the bookstore which Anju loves and which her mother had planned to bequeath her, also has to be sold to provide for two dowries (ibid). The force of the dominant discourse leads to the loss of yet another childhood dream for Anju.

Linked to the issue of caste endogamy within arranged marriages is the importance attached to astrological matters. Horoscopes of the concerned candidates are matched by both sides of the families in many cases. Establishing individual compatibility ranks low in priority, while arranging caste and class-based Hindu marriages is often done with the aid of astrological charts and horoscopes. Within some families, astrological calculations outweigh most other considerations. Bayly asserts:

Within some sections of India's expanding middle-classes, there has been a trend for parents to downgrade 'traditional' caste considerations, and to give far greater priority to astrological calculations in matrimonial searches. Even so, there can be little doubt that in these situations those of 'clean' caste will expect spouses to be of broadly 'respectable' origin, thus ruling out 'tribals' or low-castes, as well as Hindu-Muslim matches. Once this is determined, such families employ the complex *vyotish* (astrology) techniques which were perfected for use in temples and royal courts in past centuries. These are held to be mathematically rigorous and therefore 'scientific'. Furthermore, since such calculations are individualised, they are often perceived as being better suited to the spirit of a modern progressive nation than a concern for the specifics of *jati*<sup>100</sup> and *gotra*<sup>101</sup>. (316)

The first three lines of this quote illustrate the paradox inherent within the modern Indian socio-cultural hegemony. The paradox lies in the fact that traditional caste considerations are simply replaced by class, qualification and monetary criteria in the name of modernisation. Patriarchal hegemony reappears in a newer more updated guise.

The insistence on astrological compatibility is closely linked with one of the central themes of Hindu religion and culture. According to Murray Milner: " . . . three sets of ideas—purity and impurity, sexual asceticism, and auspiciousness and inauspiciousness—play a key role in the day-to-day life of traditional Hindus"(52). It is again an ironic situation, because consensual control operates in the power given to the astrologers. It is a matter of securing Brahminical dominance, which in modern India is merely another form of class dominance by vested interests.

Brahmin priests such as Raghothamachar (*Tamarind Mem*) with their aura of pseudo-benevolence appear as the most negative face of the traditional intellectuals in Gramscian ideology. They are complete subversions of the Gramscian concept of the organic intellectual who would attempt to suppress the hegemony of the traditional intellectual upon all social discourses. Boggs asserts that in the Gramscian sense: " 'intellectual activity' . . . might be understood as furnishing cohesion and 'homogeneity' to class formation; as such, it works to either reproduce or undermine the forms of bourgeois hegemony"(220).

Using their fiction as an analytical apparatus, Badami, Divakaruni and Hariharan delve at length into this aspect of Hindu cultural norms. The marriage arrangements within the novels generally appear to involve the matching of horoscopes. In Divakaruni's novel, the importance of stars for good fortune is stressed, especially when it comes to situations of marriages being arranged. Observing her aunt's obsession with all astrological matters, Anju ironically comments: "Our stars must be really well aligned this month, Aunt N. keeps saying. First Sudha's marriage is all set, then I get a proposal, and now someone wants to buy the bookstore"(124). Hariharan portrays Sita planning for Devi's marriage with the help of horoscopes. Devi remembers:

When I turned eighteen, my mother took out my horoscope from a box in her locker. It was stained with auspicious dabs of turmeric-yellow on its four corners, and it smelt faintly of camphor and sandalwood. It seemed to already weave a mysterious spell around us, a web of dark and enchanted ritual. (16)

The hegemonic system sends out a message of enforced submission to a daughter who decodes it ambiguously. She is not sure of the logic behind her own submission to maternal dictates. Gramscian ideology can be utilised to get a clearer perspective on such socio-cultural hegemonies:

Gramsci pointed out that: insofar as these ruling ideas are internalized by the majority of people and become a defining motif of everyday life, they appear as "common sense" – i.e., as the "traditional popular conception of the world."<sup>102</sup> . . . it justifies various types of system serving deprivation and sacrifice. Hence the structure of ideological domination works in many ways to induce the oppressed strata to accept or "consent to" their own daily exploitation and misery. (Boggs 161)

Preparatory to fixing her marriage, Saroja's father consults an astrologer who makes the most of his client's anxiety to get a daughter married (Badami 175-6). The author portrays the negative aspects of caste-regulated Brahminic society, whereby many families land themselves in the clutches of unscrupulous astrologers who tally horoscopes and make money as the opportunities present themselves. The family astrologer-cum-priest consulted by Saroja's father manages to fashion a horoscope for the proposed groom Vishwamoorthy, though the candidate's birth time is not available for reference

(173). Saroja's distrust is palpable: "This is how I like to imagine it all happened. The priest, lusting after a silk cloth, ten rupees, a bag of rice and a bottle of *ghee* – which is what my father paid him – fiddled with the positions of birth stars and forced our horoscopes to agree"(176). But her distrust is forced into suppression under the censure of the dominant ideology within which her mother fashions her life and that of her siblings.

A culturally insensitive reader might question the basis for the usually dominant father deferring to the mother's decision-making in the lives of Saroja and her siblings. The reason lies in the constraints placed by hegemonic discourse on too much paternal interaction with children in those days. Saroja's mother functions as a female patriarch within the home (see Chapter Three) socialising the girl within the dominant norms. This feature of patriarchy allowed room for the older Hindu women to manipulate themselves into positions of power within the home. Though Saroja's mother is usually acquiescent, she is by no means subdued. When she is displeased she is very vocal, as over the visit of the uncouth photographer Guhan: " 'Why does that fool have to come to our house?' . . . She whips around the room picking up the dirty plates, slamming them together, rattling spoons to display her irritation. She knows that Appa cannot stand the clatter of steel against steel"(Badami168).

An interpretive reading community can discern the current of Hindu Brahminism in the different actions of the protagonists: the asceticism of Gopal, the wanderings and storytelling of Saroja, the renunciation of Parvathi and the soul searching of Devi; they all are acts carrying ancient mythical overtones. They are part of the everyday tales in the daily lives of Hindus. In fact, Deshpande's book opens with the quote from the Upanishads in which the sage Yajnavalkya announces to his wife his plans to renounce the world:

'Maitreyi,' said Yajnavalkya, 'verily I  
am about to go forth from this  
state (of householder).'

--- *Brhad-aranyaka Upanishad* (II.4.1)

Prince Siddhartha's renouncing his kingdom and family to become the Buddha is also part of Hindu lore. Within Divakaruni's fiction, Gourima can be perceived as the faithful Savithri, devoted to a dead husband's wishes; Nalini can be read as the disgruntled and unfairly demanding Queen Kaikeyi from *Ramayana* and Mrs. Sanyal can be visualised as the demoness Putana who attempts to poison the baby god Krishna by letting him suckle her breast. She is foiled, as is Mrs. Sanyal, in her attempt to erase the life of Dayita.

The authors smoothly incorporate these facets of Brahminism within the texts. They write with the knowledge and skill of the cultural insiders which they are; all Brahmin women (see Chapter Three). They incorporate the Brahminism within their works more as a matter of fact, rather than from a judgmental and critical tone. In their portrayal of caste implications in the lives of the characters there is more irony than anger. Badami's portrayal of Saroja's frantic worshipping of all Hindu gods and her anger at them, as her husband lay dying, contains humour mingled with pathos. Kamini recalls:

Ma broke coconuts at the Kali temple in Guwahati. But nothing helped. Poor Ma, sneaking to the temple, reluctant to believe in superstition, yet afraid not to, furious with the goddess for failing her, furious with all the gods in the pantheon, angry with Dadda for giving up so easily. (138)

Divakaruni sketches the influence of ideological hegemonies operative in the form of caste endogamy within the value systems of the younger protagonists, in spite of physical distance from country and community. Sunil is a computer professional stationed in the USA. It is probable that he has had relationships with different women in America, suggested in his father's reference to 'drinking and whoring' (173). But when it comes to marriage, he prefers to return home to India and find a bride within his marriage circle, with Anju, a Bengali Brahmin girl. The Gramscian scholar, Esteve Morera observes:

The meaning of consensus in Gramsci's theory of hegemony must be found not in the apparent willingness of an individual to engage in certain activities, but rather in the conditions for that willingness to be present. For, as Gramsci puts it, hegemony is not the result of the sum of individual acts of consent, but rather, the organization of a collective will. To create a new hegemony means to organize the will of individuals so that in their free actions they nevertheless choose within permissible limits, limits

that are set by the interests of a ruling class. (165)

In her studies of the Indian community in the United States, the cultural anthropologist Maitrayee Chaudhari provides further insights into the educated Indian male's tendency to stay within an endogamous marriage circle. Chaudhari observes how even US settled Indian girls reared within an indigenous cultural milieu versed in all Indian literary and musical arts and customs and manners are still not preferred brides for the US based grooms. Chaudhuri claims:

Almost everyone mentioned how usually the girls could speak an Indian language, while the boys could not, and how girls get dressed in Indian clothes and learnt Indian music and dance. That of course did not stop the boys from wanting to return to India for an arranged marriage with their brides, their Asian Indian American women counterparts not being Indian enough (read docile enough) for them. This attempt to confine women to the 'inner domain' perceived as an Indian cultural space was a pivotal issue of generational conflict for the community.<sup>103</sup>

(195)

Anju and Sunil have frequent conflicts after she reaches the States. Anju is well aware of the dissonances within her marital relationship with Sunil, she observes: "silence has never been a solution with us, and usually, a day or so after we have called India, we find a pretext to fight"(Divakaruni 213). A reader can interpret the reason for that as Anju's apparent lack of docility and refusal to meekly submit to the discursive hegemony. Watching a sleeping Anju, Sudha thinks of her as: "... battling the demons of her dream world just as she has always fought in her waking life anyone who will not let her be herself"(122). There is also Sunil's unvoiced expectations of a rather unquestioning Indian wife. The reader who reads as a cultural insider would be aware that Anju's passionate and aggressive stance towards life would not be liked by Indian men reared within patriarchal hegemony. Her aunt Nalini had often taunted her on her tendency to question injustice, a characteristic not encouraged in the so-called 'homely Indian girls.' It is considered a trait that might bring discomfort to the marital relationship. Atrey and Kirpal state that a "... girl's entire being is ... conditioned towards ensuring the comfort and well-being of her husband"(20).

Anju (*Sister of My Heart*) and Saroja (*Tamarind Mem*) have especially not functioned as 'women' in contemporary patriarchal and Brahminical terms. They have got into the skins of the ancient Brahmin women of India, those learned in the Vedas, who challenged scholars and won debates. They have in a sense reverted to their own kind in ancient Hindu civilization; to a period prior to the creation of the darker and more repressive side of Hindu Brahminism. Pandit Altekar cites such an example circa 800 B.C.:

In the philosophical tournament held under the auspices of King Janaka of Videha, the subtlest philosophical questions were initiated for discussion by the lady philosopher Gargi, who had the honour to be the spokesman of the distinguished philosophers at the court. She launched her attack on Yajnavalkya, the newly arrived philosopher, with admirable coolness and confidence. 'Just as an experienced archer,' says she, 'would get ready to attack his enemy with two piercing arrows kept at hand, so I assail you with two test questions. Answer them if you can.' The topics of her enquiry were so abstruse and esoteric in character that Yajnavalkya declined to discuss them in public. <sup>104</sup> (14)

In their portrayal of female protagonists, the authors have constantly subverted the hegemonic ideal of the docile and obedient Hindu woman. This subversion appears to be their means of showing that hegemonic expectations and ideal marital situations are not usually compatible. The independent female protagonists with their strong opinions present the contemporary feminine face of middle- class urban Hindu India, where hegemonic ideologies have had to become accommodating to a certain degree. Even the apparently quieter older generation such as Saroja's mother (*Tamarind Mem*) do not offer complete submissive silence; it is a silence encompassing domination through gentle verbal manipulation.

Strong authorial criticism of caste-ridden Hindu society is seen in the portrayal of lives such as Chinna's (*Tamarind Mem*) and Abha Pishi's (*Sister of My Heart*). Both Pishi and Chinna are widows. The differences in their status lies in the fact that Abha Pishi finds a position of respect within her brother's household, whereas Chinna is treated rather like a handy servant at the homes of all relatives and passed around from one to the other depending on which relatives' household requires extra help. But both Pishi and Chinna

are initially brought to the state of depending on relatives owing to their own fathers' refusal to provide them with any means of support for their independence and self-respect. They live restricted lives, forbidden choice foods and attire. Leela Dube observes that ". . . the prescriptions and prohibitions regarding food for women are governed by principles of kinship, marriage and sexuality"(7).

But in the patriarchally determined lives of these widows, the authors show elements of hegemonic subversion which operate within the inner community of women. Chinna is abject in her subservience to those who give her shelter. The dominant discourse decrees she be so. But her awareness of her own plight is observed when she urges Saroja's father to let Saroja complete her education: " 'Look at me!' she points to her widow's garb, her bald head . . . 'suppose something happens to her husband, what will she do without an education?' " (Badami 165). Though Chinna takes no steps which push her outside caste circle and its constraints, Abha Pishi clearly violates caste norms when she advises Gourima to sell the ancestral mansion to give Sudha's unborn daughter and all the women concerned, a new lease of life. " 'What is it but a heap of stone anyway?' Pishi continues, 'the true Chatterjee spirit, if there is such a thing, must live on in us. Us, the women---and the little one who's coming, whom we must be ready to welcome'"(Divakaruni 262). She actively challenges the patriarchal discourse and tells Sudha to discard the false trappings of married life after the dissolution of the latter's marriage (see Chapter Three). Pishi has moved beyond the boundaries of the complete cultural insider. Her discerning and critical attitude toward meaningless social norms helps her function as a 'participant-observer'.

The authors provide insights as to how a network of women supporting each other manages to function independently within the hegemony of caste and tradition bound structures. The narratives bring out the vital need for such support within the female community. It is this support which enables Sumi (*A Matter of Time*) to forge a new life. But the flaw lies within the female patriarchs who because of individual vested interests keep strengthening the hands of patriarchal hegemony. A reader could hope that if a few more persons like Abha Pishi and Sumi took up supporting their own kind perhaps, after



an initial period of resistance, the Indian socio-cultural discourse could rid itself of the stranglehold of patriarchy to a great extent.

The narratives also expose the ironic contradictions inherent within the Hindu socio-cultural situation. Women help women up to a point, but never enough to completely enable them to shatter the stranglehold of patriarchy and caste-hegemony. Pishi, who supports the pregnant Sudha is the same person who had also enforced caste rules and taboos strictly within youthful Sudha's mind; through observing strictly enforced pollution rules for even such simple tasks as handling mangoes to be pickled. The young Sudha comments: "... drying mangoes is an important job, not something she can trust to a maidservant, for everyone knows that if the slices are touched by a woman who hasn't bathed, or has lain with a man that day, or is menstruating, they will turn furry with fungus" (Divakaruni 21-2). Divakaruni's fictional reality is not fashioned from a vacuum. It contains strong elements of the existing socio-cultural ideologies. Douglas claims: "Bringing pollution, unlike sorcery and witchcraft, is a capacity which men share with animals, ... Pollution can be committed intentionally, but intention is irrelevant to its effect--- it is more likely to happen inadvertently" (114).

There exists an inherent dichotomy Hindu culture wherein the woman revered as mother and nourisher is also the one that can be sacrificed as required. In earlier periods, Hindus performed *Kumari puja* where they worshipped a virgin as the ultimate symbol of purity. In Tantrik Hinduism to propitiate the gods, virgins could also be sacrificed as required by beheading at the altar.

Kalyani, as a female figure, nullifies in most ways, the identification of the Hindu woman with 'Shakti' or the female power principle. The pathos of the elderly Kalyani's situation is evocatively narrated by Deshpande. A criticism of certain Hindu social mores of earlier times can be detected by the readers. However, a reader would need to possess the awareness and knowledge of the cultural insider to understand Kalyani's situation in its entirety. Under the rules of caste-endogamy peculiar to the Kannadiga Brahmin community<sup>105</sup> within which they are located, her mother Manorama arranges Kalyani's marriage to Shripati who is Kalyani's own maternal uncle and the marriage is neither

happy nor compatible, especially after the loss of their son for which her husband blames Kalyani, thus condemning her to an existence in which he never communicates with her (138-42). Her granddaughters, who are of a different generation discuss with a sense of amazement the silent horror that is Kalyani's life. But: "they know nothing of the reason for the marriage, . . . of the cruelty that made Kalyani accept a feared uncle as a husband. They have no idea of the hopelessness that lay within the relationship, that doomed it from the start"(143). To maintain caste rules and family honour, the individual happiness is always sacrificed. Also Manorama served her own vested interests, as she secured greater dominance over her family by marrying her daughter to her brother.

But what a reader can discern even as a cultural outsider, is the form of caste/class racism that constantly runs throughout the novels. Fear of disorder, of assimilation of the outsider, are constant threats to the hegemonic structure. Thus the insistence on purity, because as Douglas analyses that "purity is the enemy of change"(163). The caste-based discrimination is very akin to racism, as hostility to the outsider exists psychologically, even if not overtly displayed. But the protagonist located within their cocooned status-dominated domains would be shocked if they were to be compared to racists. Most of the protagonists do not attempt extensive questioning of the traditional ideologies dominating their lives, including intelligent women such as Gourima, Abha Pishi (*Sister of My Heart*) and Sita (*The Thousand Faces of Night*). Using Gramscian ideologies, Morera remarks that ". . . posing questions, developing theories, and making them assume the character of social forces is an exercise that must begin with the actual culture of the people to be persuaded" (44).

Some characters such as Saroja (*Tamarind Mem*) Sudha (*Sister of My Heart*) and Devi (*The Thousand Faces of Night*) are cultural insiders in terms of caste but have clearly violated the sanctions of caste boundaries by their actions. In this analysis, the term caste can often be considered to overlap with the terms 'class', 'group' and 'community', in the context of urban Indian society.

Certain characters within the fictional narratives precariously balance their positions as caste and class members combined with their roles as individuals. Saroja (*Tamarind Mem*), an upper middle-class Hindu Brahmin woman, wife of a senior railway official, flouts both caste and class rules by having an affair with an Anglo-Indian car mechanic. It is a flagrant disturbance of the social order. Mary Douglas asserts:

The mother is the decisive parent for establishing caste membership. Through women the blood and purity of the caste is perpetuated . Therefore their sexual purity is all-important, and every possible whisper of threat to it is anticipated and barred against.

This should lead us to expect an intolerable life of restriction for women. (145)

Saroja who suffers such restrictions in the form of constraints on her education and an incompatible caste-based marriage with an older man, breaks all conventions by having an illicit affair with Paul da Costa, an Anglo-Indian. The Anglo-Indian community has always been socially shunned by the upper-caste Hindus as well as lower caste ones. They are true cultural outsiders in terms of being ‘half-castes’. Badami’s novel illustrates the fact that Anglo-Indians were, and in some cases even today remain socially on the fringes of Hindu society. During the Raj, their mix of Indo-European parentage had endeared them neither to the British nor to the Indians (see Chapter Three). In matrimonial terms they are considered ‘half-breeds’ by Indian Christians. When Saroja refuses to elope with him, Paul da Costa mocks himself: “This fool has two types blood in his body and your high-caste Brahmin mind cannot handle that? Can’t do anything about this, memsahib, it is part of me, will go to my grave”(229). The Indian social attitude to Paul da Costa can be better understood in the light of Douglas’s analysis: “Physical crossing of the social barrier is treated as a dangerous pollution, . . . The polluter becomes a doubly wicked object of reprobation, first because he crossed the line and second because he endangered others”(140).

Saroja’s affair with Paul shocks the servants not so much from its adulterous aspect as in the disorder and pollution it creates within the socio-cultural context of the railway culture, which is in itself a mini-world within India. It is a fear of all class boundaries being lost and the comfort zone of all strata of society being disturbed. Not only upper

but lower classes too fear disruption, an invasion by the foreign element as seen in da Costa.<sup>106</sup> The Indian caste and class systems survive on the basis of limited inclusiveness; any breaking down of barriers has the potential to degenerate into chaos.

When Paul da Costa commits suicide, the railway colony officials are outraged at his having chosen to do away with himself at the officers' club instead of a place more suited to his lower social status :

The identity of the body did not interest most people. . . . an actual death, in the club of all places, that moved them. And the indignation that a mere workshop mechanic, an Anglo too, had broken the rules of membership to hang himself in the Officers' Club!

(Badami 109)

Not only is he a supposed outcast, but he is a blue-collar worker too. Other blue-collar employees, Linda Ayah included, find his audacity offensive, as well as a disturbance to the set social order. Mary Douglas stresses the firm physical sanctions based on notions of pollution versus purity which maintained a set order within society at all levels. She continues:

ultimately India's lower castes used to keep in their place because of . . . effective social sanctions, and all the way up the edifice of caste political and economic forces help to maintain the system. But wherever the lines are precarious we find pollution ideas come to their support. Physical crossing of the social barrier is treated as a dangerous pollution. . . . The polluter becomes a doubly wicked object of reprobation, first because he crossed the line and second because he endangered others. (140)

But caste and class permit application of dual standards. Therefore, Saroja manages to stay within the fold of caste and community simply by means of conducting the affair secretly. The only ones who appear to be aware are her elder daughter Kamini and her servant Linda Ayah. But given the strict class bound decorum within Indian society, it would not be feasible for Linda Ayah publicly to condemn her mistress's actions. All she can do is covertly convey to Saroja that the latter is making a serious mistake in conducting the liaison, using proverbs or metaphors: " 'Memsahib, tell me, if you sit in a mortar can you avoid being hit by a pestle?' she asks suddenly, . . ." (210). The limitations between the classes are very clearly set, and for Linda Ayah to venture further would be to clearly disturb the order governing such relationships.

Saroja's relationship with the mechanic violates all class and caste barriers, posing a strong challenge to the hegemonic discourse. "Sexual collaboration is by nature, fertile, constructive, the common basis of social life"(Douglas 141). But it is so within a set of rules, and among chosen groups termed the 'marriage circle'. If the rules are broken, the ostracism of the polluters occurs from "a desire to keep straight the internal lines of the social system"(ibid).

Sexual liaisons are considered polluting without the bonds of marriage and outside the bounds of the 'marriage-circle.' According to Klass "an Indian marriage-circle reflects both territoriality and kinship and to ignore one of these organizational principles is to distort one's understanding of the structure . . ." (94). It includes families amongst whom matrimonial bonds may be forged depending on certain commonalities of religion, caste, class and other such factors.

Sudha (*Sister of My Heart*) as a divorced mother has lost her earlier status of purity as the daughter of a household; therefore she is now in a position to accept Ashok (who is of a lower caste) as a husband, if she desires. In fact, being a divorcee with a daughter, hegemonic ideologies dictate that she should consider herself fortunate to be loved by a man who is unmarried and well-established. When Ashok suggests that Sudha's baby should not live with them after they are married, Sudha refuses to abandon her child (274-8), but her mother is displeased with the lack of importance Sudha attributes to the dominant social mores. Sudha says: "My mother is absolutely against me turning Ashok down"(284). Such situations lend further weight to Atrey and Kirpal's assertion that: "for the woman, marriage . . . represents the ultimate goal of her existence. Without her marital status, she would be a cipher since society views her only as a daughter, wife or mother"(99).

A culturally sensitive reader would comprehend how far Sudha has ventured outside the insider status of the caste group when she decides to move to the USA to be with her cousin. She prioritises her relationship with Anju and her daughter. She thereby strongly

subverts the hegemonic code in according secondary status to Ashok, who as a man has social priority. The traditional face of Hindu socio-cultural discourse accords a much lower rank to a woman:

She is known and recognized only through her relationship with man and is not expected to have an independent identity. Even in modern times, when women have achieved economic independence, they are still regarded as inferior to men. (Atrey and Kirpal 104)

With her expertise in subtle manipulation, Sita (*The Thousand Faces of Night*) is in no danger of losing her caste status. She is in fact regarded as a model wife and mother by all apart from her daughter. Even the *pedas*<sup>107</sup> at her highly popular parties are considered perfect (104). Neither Sita nor Saroja (*Tamarind Mem*) or Anju (*Sister of My Heart*) loses her place within the family, caste and social fabrics. Saroja's daughter Kamini, also escapes that problem in the modern urban Indian social milieu. Sudha loses her social niche to some extent, and the one who moves completely beyond the caste and class circle, attaining 'outsider' status within the caste and community network, is Devi (*The Thousand Faces of Night*).

Devi is a South Indian Brahmin girl from a good family and married to a man whom society would term a highly eligible husband from her own caste. But her elopement with Gopal, her North Indian musician lover, places her totally outside caste boundaries. She has created complete chaos within the social order and has violated the norms laid down for a wife and daughter. These traditional repressive norms had been outlined after marriage by her father-in-law: "The woman has no independent sacrifice to perform, no vow, no fasting; by serving her husband, she is honoured in the heavens"(55). Devi has shattered all traditional definitions of wifely duties by establishing relations with another male. Caste taboos and rules of pollution imply: "pollution incurred through food affects both women and men internally, but pollution incurred through sexual intercourse is radically different in character for the two sexes" (Dube 11).

The reader who possesses knowledge of the subtle nuances of cultural conflicts even within the same status groups will understand that Gopal's being North Indian renders

Devi's act more socially unacceptable, as the cultural divide between the northern and southern parts of India goes back a long way in history. In spite of the common base of Hinduism there are more differences than similarities. Therefore, the reader anticipates that Devi will have to search long and hard for social redemption. Analysing the Hindu socio-cultural framework, Douglas comments that "a polluting person is always in the wrong. He has developed some wrong condition or simply crossed some line which should not have been crossed and this displacement unleashes danger for someone"(114). Devi's return to her mother's home in the end is a challenge, both to the mother-daughter relationship as well as the caste and socio-cultural network. Devi realises that "to stay and fight, to make sense of it all, she would have to start from the very beginning"(Hariharan 139).

What appears to ultimately defeat female spirit and ensure dominance of caste and class-based hegemonic structures is the fact that the powerful female protagonists always work at cross purposes with each other. The irony of the situation is skilfully evoked by all authors. None of the mothers, even the ones possessing intelligence and qualifications, push their daughters forward to stand up in life without male support. Neither Gourima (*Sister of My Heart*), nor Sita (*The Thousand Faces of Night*), or Saroja (*Tamarind Mem*) allocate space to their children to develop as individuals. Only in the character of Sumi (*A Matter of Time*) can the reader discern a hopeful note auguring the advent of non-repressive Indian motherhood, all embracing yet freedom-giving. Mostly, within the texts, the Indian female power, the much vaunted *shakti* of the myths works against itself. But the authorial handling of the texts conveys clearly the external pressures that sometimes render impotent female strength and solidarity. Dube's comments further elucidate the vulnerability of the women: "Women's lives are largely lived within familial parameters. The centrality of the family and the household in their lives cannot therefore be overemphasized" (2).

The male protagonists function well within the outlines of caste and class hierarchies. Even Gopal (*A Matter of Time*) seeks refuge in asceticism from the burdens of a householder's life. But in the process he considers only his own needs; not those of Sumi

and his daughters. In spite of his liberal stance, he has imbibed at a certain level elements of the dominant ideology, which have taught him to prioritise his own desires over the needs of his family, even his children who are dependent on him. Gopal is apparently reliving the legend of the Buddha or the story of Yajnavalkya; that of the householder turned wandering mendicant in search of the truth. But Deshpande's literary skill enables the reader to look beneath the veneer to the intrinsic self-indulgence of Gopal's act; which actually subverts the ethics underlying the fundamentals of Hindu life. The social-anthropologist T.N. Madan refers to the *Manusmriti* (renowned *Dharmashastra* text): "which forbids men to become renouncers until they have discharged the traditional three debts (to gods, gurus and ancestors) by living the life of the householder"(2). None of the duties listed here have been performed by Gopal.

The character of Rayaru, Saroja's grandfather who utilises hypergamous social codes to maintain a mistress while a family man, is used by Badami as a symbol of the unjust patriarchal dictates that held sway over Hindu society in earlier decades. But in today's class and status-based and morally more hidebound Indian urban society, with its rigid norms of respectability, it is not easy for a man to escape social condemnation of illicit affairs. But they do not suffer as much as women in the same situation. The younger generation of men appear to follow the social codes of respectable morality. Neither Sunil nor Ramesh (*Sister of My Heart*) or Mahesh (*The Thousand Faces of Night*) or any of the younger men portrayed by Deshpande such as Ramesh, Rohit, Hrishi are interested in proving their virility by conducting adulterous affairs or maintaining mistresses. The younger male protagonists in Deshpande's book present the positive aspects of romance within the Indian socio-cultural discourse. They present a picture of hope for the future of man-woman relationships.

The most important factor of Indian society at all levels, even today, is the importance of the family in all spheres of life, versus the importance of the individual. The family is paramount in Indian social and cultural life. The term family in this case refers to the extended family. Within the fiction it is observed that the extended family in some cases is a boon and in others a curse. For Sumi and her daughters (*A Matter of Time*), upon



Gopal's desertion, their extended family is like a shady tree protecting them (89). But for Saroja (*Tamarind Mem*), the extended family is a point of harassment; whether it is her grandfather Rayaru further obstructing her desire to be educated: " 'Maybe we did a wrong thing sending her to college,' says Rayaru" (170) or having her sisters-in-law foisted on her every summer, in spite of the unpleasantness it causes in her own household. Her elder daughter Kamini recalls:

It was time to put away the crockery, hide the knives and forks, make sure the gardener and the maids and the iron-man and the peon knew what to do, because it was summertime again and the Aunties were coming. We all liked Vijaya Aunty, but Meera was straight from the lunatic asylum. (62)

The caste group as well as the family group assume enormous importance within the socio-cultural milieu. They have to be appeased to make life comfortable in terms of daily living. Within the fiction, the upper castes appear to hold on to the idea of group conformity, especially through the means of marriages arranged very rigidly according to rules. But the agony inherent in the lives of many of the older generation is seen in the condition of Kalyani (*A Matter of Time*), condemned to silence by an unbending husband harbouring hidden resentments towards her for his domination by his sister, Manorama, who was also Kalyani's mother (143). This is equally visible in the life of Devi's mother-in-law Parvati, who leaves home following the ascetic's path of *vanaprastha*<sup>108</sup> (*The Thousand Faces of Night*), and in the tormented lives of Gourima, Nalini and Sunil's mother who also labours under the tyranny of an abusive husband (*Sister of My Heart*). The sorrows brought by the thoughtless arranged marriages of earlier eras is seen in the widowed and sterile lives of Abha Pishi (*Sister of My Heart*) and Chinna (*Tamarind Mem*). Through all this, one loses sight of the married couple as a united entity, as one is diverted into many never-ending aspects of family.

Ritualism is an important means of maintaining social order within the Hindu cultural system and especially the caste system. For instance, even the urban Hindu Brahmin males consider it an important caste ritual to hold their sacred thread at the bathing hour and recite the *Gayatri Mantra*.<sup>109</sup> All marriages within the fiction follow an elaborate set

of rules and rituals which control the lives of the individuals. It is not easy to violate these rules without attracting social criticism. Such rituals were considered essential to the maintenance and continuance of the social norms and structure. They ensure that a particular form of world-order remained intact. Levi-Strauss comments: "Ritual . . . is . . . 'played' . . . , like a favoured instance of a game, remembered from among possible ones because it is only one which results in a particular type of equilibrium between the two sides"(113).

This chapter has explored the issue of caste and marriage in Indian society from various angles using the perspectives offered by the women authors of the texts. None of the authors have ignored the issue of caste. All the writers have in some way or another presented the important role played by caste in the middle class urban Indian socio-cultural milieu and the vital role it plays in determining choice in arranged marriages within the group. Within the narratives are characters who have broken caste, class and community rules either discreetly or flagrantly. Depending on their degree of discretion they have suffered the consequences. This chapter also attempts to clarify the intertwined concepts of caste and class in modern Indian society and to some extent their link with financial status.

Most importantly, the changing yet constant face of caste in the novels has been analysed, and the conclusion is that caste as a factor dominating lives in urban India is not going to be dislodged easily, especially in matters pertaining to marriage and family relationships. What stands out in this analytical study of the fiction, through the hegemony of caste, is the importance of the family and caste and class group above the individual's importance. This aspect of Indian life is observed in each chapter. That is the most fundamental feature of Indian society, even in an urban milieu.

The extended family assumes paramount importance in Indian social and cultural life at the cost of marital and individual happiness. What is interesting is the ironic perspective the writers bring to bear upon this social system. Using their narratives as a medium, the writers depict the existence of a great divide between and within families. It appears a

basic cultural feature within most families. In a society where extended families are prioritised, it is remarkable to note the lack of assimilation felt by individuals in marital situations. Very rarely do husbands and wives appear to be an entity in themselves. Gopal and Sumi (*A Matter of Time*) are the only couple who can be termed friends and a complete entity as husband and wife. The rest are merely married couples. Gramsci observes: “we experience the concrete birth of a need to construct a new intellectual and moral order, that is, a new type of society, and hence the need to develop more universal concepts and more refined and decisive ideological weapons”<sup>110</sup>(Boggs 166).

Sumi (*A Matter of Time*) achieves the most in terms of critical consciousness, almost bordering on spirituality. As the novels are located in the Indian socio-cultural tradition, the borders between critical consciousness and spiritual realization sometimes tend to be blurred. But Sumi grasps it all, even the essential aloneness of mankind regardless of gender, which is the final disillusioning feature, and along with it a sense of the perfection of the universe in its entirety. The culturally entrenched reader could interpret that from a Hindu Brahmin perspective, Sumi attains *Moksha* before death, a glimpse of divinity : “ . . . for a moment, a very brief moment, it’s as if a veil of darkness has lifted, revealing a world beyond, bathed in a mellow luminous light. A picture in which everything is sharp and clear, in which there are no shadows at all”(233). In the Hindu sense, Sumi’s heightened critical consciousness moves into spirituality giving her a glimpse of eternal peace.

Ironically these Brahmin authors subvert the discourse of the Brahmin wiliness and hegemony. All the Brahmin intelligence of the protagonists fails to ensure the happiness of future generations. It is the analytical voice of the Brahmin women speaking, as the ones who traverse the boundaries between the cultural insiders and outsiders. The scepticism of the younger generation regarding the hegemonic discourses emphasising past glories is conveyed through Mahesh’s statement:

“Oh yes, Baba and his Brahmin saints from a glorious past. But let me tell you, Devi, Baba is still to learn how things work in real life.

*The Thousand Faces of Night* (55)

## Chapter Five: Education and Hegemony

*A woman can read and study all she pleases, her words mean nothing after all. So why are you wasting your youth and our money? Get married.*

*Tamarind Mem (158)*

In his definition of the concept of education, Julius Gould, the social sciences theorist states:

The most general usage of the term denotes bringing up (of the young) intellectual and moral training: the development of mental powers and character, especially through the provision of systematic instructions, e.g. in schools and other institutions of full time education. (227)

Since ancient times, India has had an organised system of education in place. In the Gurukul system of education, the student (usually a male) started living at his guru's hermitage with other pupils and acquiring education. Don Adams describes the ancient Indian education system:

The common pattern of education, . . . was a private tutorial arrangement under the direction of gurus or masters . . . a class of men who were . . . frequently of the Brahmin caste. A guru would accept a certain number of students into his household where they would serve him, beg alms . . . and engage in academic studies in which great emphasis was put on oral work and memorization. The close bond between student and teacher was the key to successful education. (70)

The teacher imparted knowledge of the Vedas as well as : “. . . the contingent of sciences necessary for a full understanding,. . . , phonetics, etymology, grammar, prosody, literature, chemistry, astronomy and mathematics”(Aubover 172). Aubover goes on to say: “The hermitages were not the only centres of higher learning. There were, in addition, several well-known universities where young Brahmins went to attend the lectures of India's most distinguished professors” (173).

In the Vedic Age, children of both sexes had access to education. The historian A. L. Basham writes: “Though women's education was never looked on as essential, girls were

by no means neglected, and well-bred women were usually literate”(1967 161). Basham’s statement is supported by Pandit Altekar’s studies of Hindu civilization: “We find one of the early Upanishads<sup>111</sup> recommending a certain ritual to a householder for ensuring the birth of a scholarly daughter”(4). With the dominance of Brahminism, around the beginning of the Christian era (Altekar 5-6), came the change in the system; especially with the lowering of the female age of marriage which resulted in loss of education for girls. With the advent of this Brahministic hegemony, the ongoing oppression of the women of India started.

Within Indian society, the first signs of a hegemonic system of discrimination appeared using the system of ‘consensual control’ (see Chapter One). The narratives portray the consequences of this discourse in modern India through the lives of women such as Abha Pishi (*Sister of My Heart*) and Chinna (*Tamarind Mem*). The cultural theorist Kunal Chakrabarti explains how the formulation of the Puranic<sup>112</sup> discourse of Brahminism relegated Vedic Hinduism to the background:

The ritual supremacy of the brahmanas was maintained through the incorporation of Grihya Sutra segments of the Smṛti literature regulating the lives of men and women by a close network of householders’ rites. It must be remembered that the insubordination of women was as much a threat to the brahminical world as the rise of the sudras, both groups being almost always clubbed together in the later brahminical texts. The dangerous potential of feminine sexuality has remained an unchanged motif throughout the Puranic literature. Thus, the Puranas aimed at redressing the imbalance in the social structure and family relations and they may be described as an attempt to reconstruct the social reality of the world of brahminism.<sup>113</sup> (56-7)

Changes in the Indian education sector occurred with the advent of British imperialism. The British organised a new system of education which they put in the place of the traditional system of Indian education, which was still partly operational in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. But by the early nineteenth century there was considerable interest regarding education amongst the Indian middle classes as well as the British. Don Adams states:

The first systematic and comprehensive statement of English educational policy in India

is found in the Educational Despatch of 1854. The Despatch, . . . called for the establishment of a degree granting university. Modelled after the University of London, the first universities were essentially examining institutions for affiliated colleges rather than teaching institutions. The new universities were particularly well received by Indian middle classes (especially by Hindus,... ), who were lured by the prospects of administrative positions. In 1857 the Indian universities enrolled 200 students; however, by 1882 the enrollment had grown to approximately 4000. The main functions of the universities may be identified as (1) the transmission of European culture and (2) selection for government employment. (75)

This is definitely a dominant aspect of any form of postcolonial critique even today. In contemporary India, certain features of the education system remain static. Today's urban youth acquires qualifications mainly as an economic necessity. But education based on occidental patterns assures greater financial remuneration. Education is also a route to better matrimonial prospects as well as a means of relocating to the First World nations. This pattern is observed in the narrative discourses. Sita educates Devi in order to secure the right bridegroom with the desired social labels (*The Thousand Faces of Night*). Sunil (*Sister of My Heart*) and Kamini (*Tamarind Mem*) both use their education to relocate to the West, while Ramesh (*Sister of My Heart*) and Mahesh (*The Thousand Faces of Night*), use their education to financially better their lives and marry within the desired social class. Chapters Two and Four outlined the emphasis placed on seeking convent-educated brides, well versed in English for professionally qualified grooms. The fictional discourse explores the lack of fairness underlying this hegemonic system which further empowers the groom's family. The ultimate victim of this modern form of patriarchy is always the woman, especially if her family hold conservative views and do not further her education. Saroja illustrates this with her memory of her Uncle Mohan's daughter:

Uncle Mohan's youngest was married to a foreign-educated lawyer and what happened? He sent her back to her father because she couldn't read any books. 'Educate her first,' he commanded. 'I have no use for a wife who cannot make conversation with me.'

Uncle Mohan was so angry. 'Is a wife for talking to? Or is she for bed and breakfast? If that fool wants a Goddess Saraswati for a wife, he can spend on her education himself. We are not responsible any more.!' (Badami 173-4)

Hegemony dictates that men make no efforts to better women's lives. As observed from the above quote though the father and the husband are using different aspects of the dominant discourse regarding female education, ultimately the woman is a victim of both father and husband.

The British Raj incorporated a formalised Western system of primary education, especially through the Christian missionary schools, imparting instruction in English. But interestingly enough, the schools set up by the missionaries in the colonial era for the children of the poor are now the domains of the rich. The upper middle class urban Indians expend large sums on their children's education to have them enrolled in these schools which are the coveted missionary schools. The importance of such schools, especially the convent schools for girls is seen in the socio-cultural milieu of the novels. Anju and Sudha attend convent schools (*Sister of My Heart*) and Saroja argues emphatically with her husband that her daughters will not attend the Central schools,<sup>114</sup> but have to be enrolled in the best convent schools in every town they moved to because of Dadda's transferable railway job. Kamini recalls that "Ma insisted on sending Roopa and me to convent schools, which were always booked full. It didn't matter where we were transferred or how far away the school was, Ma stood in the admission queues and got us in"(Badami 36).

Dadda always loses his argument with Saroja over the matter of the girls' education :

'What is wrong with a Central School education?' he demanded . . .

'They teach in Hindi . . .

. . . you could go to Francis Xavier and St. Andrew's, but it is okay for your daughters to go to any rubbish-pile place.'

'Those days it was necessary,' said Dadda. 'Now we're an independent country, remember?'

'Yes, but without English they will be like the servants' children, what's the difference then, you tell me?' argued Ma. (Badami 36-7)

One of Saroja's main arguments is that the girls need to speak English well. A dual form of hegemony is visible here. Dadda's ideas incorporate a patriarchal discourse which

does not lay much emphasis on girls' education. Saroja is battling that form of patriarchy for her daughters as she had tried to fight for herself. But she is also subject to a form of hegemony which dictates that all educated Indian girls must necessarily speak good English in order to ensure not just their matrimonial future, but their class and status hierarchy. She firmly believes that command over English safeguards her daughters' future socio-cultural status:

Even as an adult, her devotion to all things British never wavered. Ma regularly subscribed to *Women at Home* magazine, which cost fifteen rupees per issue. . . . I had to read the children's section out loud to her each month, making sure that I remembered to round my mouth over the "w"s and bite my lip on the "v"s like the British radio news-readers on the BBC. (Badami 20)

With English seems to lie the power to escape the patriarchal discourse while submitting to another form of hegemony. T. J. Scrase explains:

There are at least four major factors that operate to keep English as a dominant language in India. These are : (a) the class position of the speaker; (b) its cultural role as a status maintainer; (c) the recent proliferation of its teaching in schools and colleges; and (d) its concentration within urban centres. . . .

Generally, in India, those who are literate in English are the middle class, many of whom are employed in elite, white-collar professions. (41)

The reader could negotiate the encoded message in different ways. What is ironic is the subtle subversion of her mother's encoded cultural messages observed in Kamini's desire to read stories closer to home, more related to her Indian life:

There were always two stories for children. I preferred the one about Nora and Tilly, two little girls who went for picnics all the time and ate lots of food. . . . I liked Nora and Tilly but wished they had different names – Gauri and Geetha, perhaps, or Mini and Bani. (Badami 20-1)

Urban Indian girls, educated in the prestigious convent schools, in the 1960s, 70s, 80s and to a lesser extent even today, imbibe a reading culture incorporating British children's fiction from the 1930s and 40s. Enid Blyton's school stories are still highly popular along with her *Famous Five* series and Elinor M. Brent-Dyer's *Chalet School*



series. The dominance of a colonial hegemony is subtle but present nonetheless. Urbanised teenage girls also follow a similar trend with their voracious consumption of Western romances, in particular, the *Mills and Boon* and *Harlequin* series. Jyoti Puri in her study observes that “the direct interdiction of reading romance novels serves to augment the pleasure derived from these books: the pleasure of reading and the pleasure of resistance”(438).<sup>115</sup> The Indian middle school children mostly read the schools stories and other books because they provide a glimpse into a world which has lesser parental controls. Badami puts Kamini’s birth year as 1962 (13). Therefore as a schoolgirl in the late 1960s and early 70s, Kamini is located within a socio-cultural discourse with a distinct colonial hangover and is also in an era where parental control was more marked. The children in those storybooks have a physical freedom denied upper class Indian children. For children educated at convent schools and not usually conversant with the literature of their own language, these books provided maximum reading material. Also there was not much of this kind of stories for children depicting a world of schools, adventures et cetera in Indian children’s fiction.

Kamini’s later reading of romance novels substantiates Jyoti Puri’s views. Cinema also works in connivance with romance novels to instil ideas of romantic love and fantasy of romance. But they work as a subculture of resistance making sex and romance seem pleasurable instead of shameful, which is probably why parents are often against them. They fulfil hegemonic needs by moulding minds ready to fall in love. In this they form a link with the myths which are often counter-hegemonic. Puri says:

Blissful marital relationships secured on the basis of mutual attraction, sexual compatibility, and unwavering loyalty can be learned from the romance novels. . . . The novels offer the possibility of greater control over futures that are at best uncertain, without completely undermining the connections between femininity, ideal heterosexual romance, and structurally inequalitarian conjugal relationships. Moreover, the novels do not threaten the class status of the middle-class Indian readers, the cultural aspirations to hypergamy, or the aspirations to waged employment. In India, for middle-class young women readers, ideal marital relationships may well be the stuff that romance novels are made of. (439)

Puri's argument is substantiated by Badami's fiction which outlines the cultural discourse regarding romance reading amongst the younger teens through Kamini's statement: "I would rather read Mills and Boon romances, where a tall, morose Greek tycoon clasped the heroine to his heaving chest and whispered "*Agape mou*" in her shell-like ear. I preferred discussing those torrid romances furtively with the other girls in moral science class. . . "(121). This validates Puri's statement: ". . . the promise of forbidden pleasures heightens the attraction of romance novels for the young readers"(439).

But Saroja's emphasis on education brings out the darker aspects of in-family socialization for girls. Her interpretation of the hegemonic discourse leads to a form of almost coercive control on Kamini's life through the constant stress on education:

I studied desperately into the night, prayed that everything I had learnt would remain in my head when I confronted the exam paper. I collected bundles of *darbha* grass to place before the tiny figure of the god Ganesha in Ma's prayer room, for he was the remover of obstacles. When Ma asked, irritated, who was bringing rubbish into the room, I kept quiet, afraid to let my mother into my fears. I couldn't bear to eat breakfast on exam days, for immediately my stomach cramped and coiled, making me want to rush to the toilet. (Badami 120)

Kamini's problems are a manifestation of the burdens of Saroja's own repressive upbringing within a patriarchal system which she transposes onto her daughters' lives by subverting the discourse yet operating within its controlling factors. Saroja and Sita (*The Thousand Faces of Night*) are women who, combating the effects of their own thwarted desires, turn their family lives into conflict zones greatly affecting their children's development. The novels hardly ever portray the family home as a nurturing and sheltering environment for the children. Family is the main nurturing centre for children as the psychological theorist Pat Duffy Hutcheon analyses: "Here they can experience the world as a secure and happy place or they can come to feel like cornered rats in a maze with a smell of danger and no place to hide. They learn to perceive all sorts of 'selves' they are and can ever hope to be"(47). The authors create a literary discourse which portrays a contrary image. The younger protagonists are constantly striving to fulfil parental aspirations or are caught in the cross-fire of parental conflicts and desires. Anju

and Sudha (*Sister of My Heart*) lead cloistered almost hermetic lives under parental decree; Kamini (*Tamarind Mem*) is constantly living under the stress of her mother's unfulfilled academic dreams, while Devi (*The Thousand Faces of Night*) is always trying to elude Sita's controlling hand which aspires to turn her into the kind of daughter Sita desires. Deshpande's novel also commences with the dismantling of the family home because of Gopal's actions.

In the narratives, parents are observed providing education to their offspring as an empowering tool, albeit within the confines of hegemony. But then the reader can decode an almost sadistic abruptness in the termination of female education. The Indian cultural theorist Purnima Mankekar states that: "the inherently unstable character of hegemonic discourses"(19) stems from the fact that "hegemonic forces are never static – they constantly work to transform or incorporate oppositional forces"(ibid). Gramsci's views concur with this idea about hegemony as he repeatedly points out that hegemonic systems change with the shifting bases of power structures: "Hegemony is part of a dynamic, always-shifting complex of relations, not the legitimating core of a static and all-encompassing totalitarian rule . . ."(Boggs 163). The educational process faces sudden interruptions in the lives of these young women due to parental whims or a change in the family's circumstances. Research scholar, Padma Sarngapani writes that "in India parents exercise an absolute moral authority over their children"(Sarangapani 89).<sup>116</sup> An unfair exercise of this absolute moral authority is seen in the abrupt termination of Sudha and Anju's education (*Sister of My Heart*); in Sita's sudden recalling of Devi (*The Thousand Faces of Night*) from America as well as in Saroja's abrupt *volte-face* and stress on matrimony when Kamini decides to be a research scholar (*Tamarind Mem*).

Chapters Two and Four referred to the matrimonial advertisements seeking convent educated brides in particular. Students from these convents generally speak fluent English, a highly sought-after attribute amongst the middle and upper middle class sections of society. Sunil's family's preference for Anju as a bride for their son stationed abroad is because of her convent-educated background (*Sister of My Heart*). Similarly the Srinivasan family want Devi as a bride not only because of their old ties with her dead

father, but also because she is a postgraduate from America and thereby considered suitable for the Srinivasan's physicist son. Devi describes her meeting with the parents: "He lives and breathes pure physics, they said. He wants a Brahmin wife, they said with visible pride . . ." (Hariharan 17). Her caste and family background combined with her education render her the perfect candidate. It is the compatibility of families that matter, not the prospective bride and groom. "Marriage is clearly a family affair; a union of families and not a union of only two individuals" (Saraswathi 229).<sup>117</sup> Purnima Mankekar, an assistant professor at Stanford University writes:

I remember vividly the sleepless nights I had known spent worrying about whether or not my in-laws would 'accept' me: I had known that even for 'foreign-educated', upper-middle class privileged women like myself, the success or failure of a marriage depended not just on the conjugal relationship, but on the complicated politics of gender, household position and the kinship surrounding young daughters-in-law as well. (34)

What Mankekar experiences appears is a natural circumstance within the Indian socio-cultural milieu. It is the hegemonic conditioning rendered powerful by the absence of critical consciousness (see Chapters Three and Four). Also present is the fear of the young girl about her status as an outsider who will have to make all efforts to assimilate into another family-group. Usha Kumar comments: ". . . she perceives the transitoriness of her ties with the family of her birth. Her perception that she has the status of a guest . . . gives very deep-rooted feelings of fear of loved ones and of abandonment" (147). In the novels, the female protagonists, barring Sumi and her daughters (*A Matter of Time*), experience a lack of acceptance from their marital family group. This leads even the educated women into the realm of 'in-between zone' characters where they move out of the mould of the total insider but are also not the complete outsider. Thus the reader could subversively read into the text that the woman considers her role-playing as vital to her existence, thereby rendering her formal education merely a veneer, as the intellectual application of educational values appears minimal. Chapter Three discussed the Indian woman constantly role-playing as the good daughter-in-law. The hegemonic socio-cultural discourse reigns supreme:

Pop culture and the mass media are subject to the production, reproduction and transformation of hegemony through the institution of civil society which

covers the areas of cultural production and consumption. Hegemony operates culturally and ideologically through the institutions of civil society which characterises mature liberal-democratic, capitalist societies. These institutions include education, the family, the church, the mass media, popular culture, etc. (Strinati 168-9)

A reader might interpret this passage as meaning that intelligent women like Gourima (*Sister of My Heart*) and Sita (*The Thousand Faces of Night*) are fulfilling the cultural and ideological assumptions of hegemony by adopting the roles of ideal wives and daughters-in-law. They have not absolutely absorbed this hegemony as is shown in their later ability to move away from these roles. In Sita's case, her taking on the ideal roles outlined by hegemony gives her the required camouflage to exert her own form of hegemony within the family discourse. Role-playing is thus seen to serve different purposes. Sudha (*Sister of My Heart*) is one protagonist who is completely conscious of the fact that she is playing the role of the good wife and daughter-in-law to satisfy the hegemonic discourse and keep her inner self untouched. It is seen in her sexual response to Ramesh : "Even sex with Ramesh . . . is a minor inconvenience. For I have discovered that if I try hard enough, I can shut down my mind while things are being done to my body"(189).

Another ironic feature of the hegemony-bound cultural education system is the expectations the educated women protagonists have from the men who are educated in the Western system. Within the Indian cultural hegemonic structure, Devi's (*The Thousand Faces of Night*) expectations that the Indian men she meets as prospective bridegrooms will be intellectually liberated enough to understand her affair with Dan, an African-American (21), are as unrealistic as Anju's (*Sister of My Heart*) who expects Sunil to be a like-minded romantically inclined literature enthusiast possessing ideological insights compatible with hers (158). Other women of the older generation have fewer expectations as compared to Saroja (*Tamarind Mem*) who is well educated for her times: "I meant to be a doctor and set up a bustling practice. My husband would be a Hindi film star, all song and sacrifice, heroism and romance"(242). Their education appears to do these women a disservice. In the case of the men it appears merely to provide a veneer of sophistication and liberation to their inherently hegemony- oriented

inner selves. Mahesh's attitude (*The Thousand Faces of Night*) perfectly illustrates this point. He has studied to get a job. Men like Mahesh are following a colonial discourse of patriarchal hegemony when they insist on educated wives for the furtherance of their careers. In her earlier book *Arranged Marriage*, Divakaruni has analysed the discourse followed by such Indian urban males : “. . . in spite of their Bill Blass suits and alligator-skin shoes and the sleek Benzes that waited for them in parking lots, they still belonged to the villages of their fathers”(1995 248).<sup>118</sup>

In the early twentieth century, the British pushed for educated Indian civil servants to have wives who could at least converse in English, and Indian male reformers desired some level of education for women to remove the stigma of India as a backward nation (see Geraldine Forbes 60-1). Most importantly, the educated young men opting for government careers and occasionally having to reside outside the folds of the extended family began to feel the need for wives with basic educational skills, and often more. Forbes writes:

Educated women accompanied their husbands to their civil service postings, joined husbands who had left their ancestral homes, opened schools, and entertained district magistrates. The two-person career was finally possible with the appearance of the carefully groomed, English-speaking wife. Women took over the task of social reform at a time when men were becoming obsessed with political action, . . . The educational system was overwhelmingly conservative, but the education of women had unexpected and unanticipated consequences. (61)

But consensual control was still functioning strongly. These educated Indian men were acting in the capacity of traditional intellectuals who support the substratum of hegemonic control (Forgacs 278). Referring back to an earlier part of the chapter, Saroja's cousin (*Tamarind Mem*) is a victim of the clash between the system of absolute orthodoxy and controlled traditionalism serving vested interests. Bettering the daily life of women or strengthening the marriage to build a more united couple and consequently a stronger nuclear family unit, appears to occupy a place on hegemony's agenda. But certain features of this dominant system had some positive effects:

The first generation of educated women found a voice: they wrote about their lives and about the conditions of women. The second generation acted. They articulated the

needs of women, critiqued their society and the foreign rulers, and developed their own institutions. (Forbes 61)

The novels portray a system of education in India which is an off-shoot of the British days. During the Raj, qualified young men aspiring to join the privileged Indian civil services required wives who were educated to a certain level to further their careers (see Forbes). The novels are located at various points in post-Independence India, the earliest being Badami's work. But in the India of the 1960s, 70s, 80s and even in contemporary India, the careers and education of most women are relegated to the background when it comes to a question of the husbands' career advancement. The literary discourse moves along these lines. The culturally conversant reader recognizes Sunil's (*Sister of My Heart*) and Mahesh's (*The Thousand Faces of Night*) need for an educated wife as well as Dadda (*Tamarind Mem*), a senior level railway official, seeking to marry Saroja who unusually for the late 1950s/early 1960s is a science graduate.

The novelists are second or third generation educated women. Deshpande's revelations about her childhood are illuminating: "*if in school we did Wordsworth and Tennyson, at home we had to learn the Amarkosa by heart*" (Menon 3).<sup>119</sup> Badami also comes from a privileged social stratum. Divakaruni's mother was a teacher<sup>120</sup> and Hariharan occupies a similar privileged position in the socio-educational hierarchical discourse. They speak from the perspective of a class of women who were one of the first to get a voice through the medium of education. But the crescendo and pitch of that voice was always controlled by the socio-cultural discourse. Saroja's aunt Vani Atthey comments: "They say it is not good to have a wife who knows too much. Bad for her husband's pride" (Badami 169).

The novels could be interpreted subversively by the reader as instruments for conveying warnings to the reader about how even education can be used as a marketing tool for matrimony rather than to further critical consciousness, thereby enabling couples to build happier lives and more integrated relationships. In the novels, it is observed that women and girls are generally relegated to the background. Saroja (*Tamarind Mem*) is intelligent and able, but her parents are extremely reluctant to educate her even beyond high school; but her brother's education is given great importance (158-65). All Saroja's entreaties get

her to college to study for a Bachelor's degree in Science, but her desire to study medicine is never fulfilled. Her mother constantly explains to her the real aim of a woman's life: "A woman is her husband's shadow . . . she follows him wherever he goes"(Badami 214).

With the trends in modernization and globalization, urban Indian society has changed in many ways. Educating a girl became mandatory amongst the urban educated middle classes; in some families training her to build a career was also acceptable. But the main event of a girl's life, indeed the reason for her existence, is considered to be her marriage. Mankekar in her study of the television influences on Indian audiences, cites the example of the views of an educated young woman named Renuka, regarding marriage and education:

While Renuka felt that women should be educated in order to be "worthy" companions to their husbands, she maintained, as did her mother, that "problems" arose if a woman was "too" highly educated. After all, she claimed, a man will not start helping his wife with housework just because she is well educated. In fact, that will only cause conflict in a marriage. Because an educated woman will get frustrated with housework. And, she added, a highly educated woman who is frustrated with her life is more likely to "shatter" her husband's family by antagonizing his parents. (134-5)

The general view amongst Indian middle classes mostly appears to be that a woman should be educated enough to be a "worthy" companion to a man and even if she is highly educated, she should not forget her traditional role as a woman. Indiradevi's studies also show Indian middle class fears regarding women's higher education: "In respect of women, education might alienate them from the social environment and make them less submissive"(68).

Middle class women functioning as female patriarchs connive at their repression of the own kind by the dominant discourse (see Chapter Three). Patriarchal hegemony constructs formal and informal educational systems to encode messages furthering their vested interests. All protagonists are educated within a system that earlier bolstered the British Empire and now bolsters the status of those in power. When Saroja makes Kamini



work out all the following year's syllabus, it is a mere competitive exercise and does not enhance the child's reflective or intellectual capacities in any way (Badami 119). Badami's novel reveals the changing socio-cultural ethos within the urban Indian society of 1960s and 70s, when education for girls started being given a certain importance. Raymond Williams uses Gramscian principles in order to further explain these changes within the social discourses:

A lived hegemony is always a process. It is not, except analytically, a system or a structure. It is a realised complex of experiences, relationships and activities, with specific and changing pressures and limits. In practice, that is, hegemony can never be singular. Its internal structures are highly complex, as can readily be seen in any concrete analysis. Moreover (and this is crucial, reminding us of the necessary thrust of the concept), it does not just passively exist as a form of dominance. It has continually to be renewed, recreated, defended, and modified. It is also continually resisted, limited, altered, challenged by pressures not at all its own. (112)

Saroja is seen shifting from one hegemonic discourse to another validating Williams' idea of hegemony as a lived process. She had earlier resisted a discourse of less education for girls, but now she follows another strand of hegemony, almost building a subculture of resistance to the earlier hegemony. But what is important is her inability to let go of the earlier hegemony. It has recreated itself in her mind as marriage for an educated daughter, perhaps incorporating her own vision of a more egalitarian conjugal relationship. What she ignores meanwhile are the pressures being faced by the child Kamini. Furthermore, Badami's novel portrays a Brahmin household where education is the main means of maintaining the social status. In this case this social status was middle classness of a Brahministic kind. Mankekar explains:

Being middle-class was not just about acquiring financial security; it was also about attaining and maintaining respectability, . . . , a structure of feeling, the habitation of a safe space that distinguished one from the less fortunate (less worthy) Others and therefore a vantage point on the world. (114)

Victims of the tradition-based patriarchy are the older protagonists such as Abha Pishi (*Sister of My Heart*), Putti Ajji and Chinna (*Tamarind Mem*) of course; but it also

includes others such as Gourima (*Sister of My Heart*), Sita (*The Thousand Faces of Night*), and Saroja (*Tamarind Mem*), who have been allowed to glimpse the freedom of mind and body afforded by education and then surrendered to a hegemonic doctrine that decreed a rationed quantity of education for them. Such hegemony in Saroja's case especially appears to function as coercive control (158-9).

These women characters possess a far higher level of intelligence compared with their male counterparts, but are not allowed to channel their talents and energies into forging any sort of careers which provide them with proper mental stimulation and satisfaction. Gourima, perhaps, is the one who finds some modicum of intellectual satisfaction in running the family bookshop business. But she works not to build a career but merely to keep the family finances flowing; finances which her husband's handling had left in disarray after his death. Abha Pishi narrates to Sudha:

In the days after the funeral, she would not allow herself to break down as your mother did. When I tried to get her to weep, to let the sorrow out of her heart, she said, 'I don't have the luxury. I made a promise and I must use all of my energies to keep it.' That's when she started going to the bookstore every day---the pawned lands were forfeit already. . . (38)

What is important is that Gouri's education has strengthened the hold of the discourse. She is constantly safeguarding as her husband would have desired "that fragile glass flower, reputation" (57) for the daughters of the Chatterjees. She has imbibed the socio-cultural discourse in the manner of a traditional intellectual. Her adherence to this form of patriarchy leads to dissonance within the household. Sudha notices: "Gourima's promise to her dead husband seemed to have frozen our entire household, like the magic spell which, in Pishi's stories, shrouded palaces in timeless sleep"(ibid). According to Carl Boggs: "Intellectuals carry forward the most elaborate and mature expression of the prevailing traditions, culture, and moral values; they impart a sense of historical purpose to social activity; and they erect an ideological defense of particular class interests"(221). Unwittingly Gouri is strengthening the hands of the very same discourse that has manipulatively destroyed the abilities of women like herself and Abha Pishi. A reader can experience frustration and the sense of being in an 'in-between-zone' as a participant as

Gouri is manipulated by the patriarchal hegemony into fulfilling the role of a traditional intellectual, as she safeguards the vested interests of her own particular social class regardless of the cost to herself and her family.

Anju functions more as an organic intellectual subverting the discourse by her anger: “What’s more important, a living daughter’s happiness, or a promise you made to a dead man . . .?”(59). Her questioning places her firmly outside the insider status regarding social discourses, but she appears to have used her education as a device to question some aspects of the oppressive Hindu social hegemonies. Sociologist Usha Kumar states that “in a mythologically instructed community, the models to which the woman may aspire are condensed in the form of Sita”(144). Kumar’s views are substantiated by Mankekar’s study. Mankekar discusses the socio-cultural discourses encoded within the highly popular teleserial *Ramayan* (based on the Indian epic). She quotes the advice given to Sita (the epic heroine) by her equally dutiful mother Sunaina: “Only a *pativrata*, a woman who devotes herself to her husband in thought, word and deed, can be a true companion to her husband. A woman should also dedicate herself to her in-laws’ happiness”(212-3). Mankekar observes that “for many viewers, Sita was the embodiment of *naari dharma*, as indexed by her modest deportment and her loyalty to her husband’s clan”(ibid).

Within the Indian urban socio-cultural discourse, the participants are exposed to enormous amounts of conflicting messages. It is seen in the lives of the protagonists, even non-questioning ones like Devi (*The Thousand Faces of Night*) who appears to let life flow over her. Her exposure to a more liberalised form of thinking owing to a Western education is what sets Devi questioning her own marriage and that of her parents and in-laws. Devi muses on her mother-in-law:

Parvatiamma had been more ambitious. She had like a man in a self-absorbed search for a god, stripped herself of the life allotted her, the life of a householder. Has she misread Baba’s stories? Or had she turned them upside down and taken the contradictions, the philosophical paradoxes to their logical conclusion? (64)

In spite of surface alterations in the lives of the characters owing to the passage of time, the fictional discourse shows the continuing power of the patriarchal hegemony. The excessive importance attached to marriage is the interesting cultural issue. Sita (*The Thousand Faces of Night*) ensures Devi obtains a good schooling and goes to America to obtain a Master's degree, but the final goal is as always, marriage above all else; education comes a poor second. Even while studying in the States, Devi is constantly made aware of this cultural discourse by her mother: "The innocuous proposals on Indian aerogrammes she had barely read . . . The regal virtuous bride: the image was embedded so deeply that she did not need to open a creaking old cupboard to rediscover the beloved toys of her girlhood"(6). This cultural trend of valuing marriage above all else for one's offspring, especially daughters, is extant amongst the contemporary Indian middle classes. Saraswathi analyses:

Females in all social classes are groomed to become good wives and mothers. Even the increasing career options of the middle-class girls are subsumed under the primary goal of marriage and motherhood, leading to consensus rather than conflict in parent-child relation. (215)

Badami creates in Saroja another such mother who first lays enormous emphasis on her daughters' education and then starts reiterating the familiar theme of marriage. But to a reader using a "negotiated reading code" as Stuart Hall would phrase it, Saroja's messages appear almost ambiguous. She tells her daughters to follow the traditional path but is upset when Roopa leaves college to marry, and is again unhappy when Kamini remains unmarried. But unlike her own parents, Saroja has empowered Kamini to follow her own life and career. So the reader could be left guessing at the concealed sub-culture of subversiveness encoded within the maternal messages. Even Gourima (*Sister of My Heart*) wants Anju to keep studying after marriage, as if warning her to keep her identity and powers intact. Again the reader notices the ambiguity, in the early coerced marriages and the later emphases on education. The older women appear to understand their own unfairness toward their daughters through their bargaining with patriarchy; but appear unwilling to find more concrete solutions which would openly challenge the dominant discourses. It appears that in they try to empower their daughters at times. But this could

be highly resistant even rogue reading, almost a fantasy on the part of a reader who is a cultural insider.

Vijay Kumari Kaushik, an Indian lecturer and theorist on Women's Rights discusses education in relation to empowerment. She asserts:

Human rights are increasingly defined by one word only: empowerment. For women, the process of empowerment entails breaking away from the cycle of learned and taught submission to discrimination, carried on from one generation of women to the next. The issue of education in the human rights context thus goes beyond inequalities in access to formal education for women; it necessitates addressing the orientation contents and impact of education on women. In both cases human rights argumentation regularly runs counter to the current situation, which is itself based on centuries of discrimination against women. (183)

The last few lines of Kaushik's statement provide the clue that in spite of women being educated, it will take a longer time for them to be fully empowered as they are victims of an ancient discriminatory system. What the novels bring out is their frightening internalization of this system and assimilation within it.

Complete adherence to hegemony is seen in Kalyani's (*A Matter of Time*) desire to get her granddaughters married. But the reader notices that when the need for supporting the women in her family comes, Kalyani is always there. Yet Kalyani is herself a woman whose education and all other freedoms have been snatched by an overbearing mother with vested interests to serve. Deshpande expertly uses her fiction to reveal the natal family as the main source of oppression and discrimination in a young girl's life. Usha Kumar refers to a girl's indoctrination within a humiliating cultural discourse by watching her mother being insulted by her paternal grandmother (147). Another side of this ideology is present within Deshpande's fiction which reveals that Kalyani is ready for subjugation and humiliation at Shripati's hands because she has already been reared within a similar discourse by Manorama, her own mother; therefore she is pliable for hegemonic oppression owing to her inter-family socialization. The reader could further speculate about Manorama's self-centred planning: Had she always planned to maintain

power within her own marital family (where she felt an outsider) by marrying her daughter off to the ultimate insider, her own brother?

But what is amazing is Kalyani's ability not to make complete victims out of her daughters because of her own past. Nowhere is she coercive in her control like Sita (*The Thousand Faces of Night*) or even Gourima (*Sister of My Heart*). Kalyani, herself a victim of an extremely unhappy marriage, is constantly worried about the question of her granddaughters' marriages after Gopal departs. The marital future of Aru her eldest granddaughter, causes Kalyani the maximum anxiety, in spite of the fact that Aru is still in her late teens and totally against the idea of marriage itself. What is observed is the female perpetuation of a discourse which is highly exploitative of their own kind through the hegemonic ideal of 'common sense,' (see Chapters Two and Three) which Gramsci considers as "the folklore of philosophy" (Boggs 161). Female patriarchs such as Nalini (*Sister of My Heart*) use the concept of common sense to justify their mishandling of their children's lives in order to keep within the guidelines of patriarchy.

Kamala Ganesh, in her studies on cultural anthropology regarding the lives of Indian women, uses the ideas of Hanna Papanek. Papanek analyses as follows:

Discussing what she calls the "foot binding paradigm", after the Chinese practice, Papanek (1990)<sup>121</sup> puzzles over the fact that mothers who have experienced the pain and dysfunctionality of restrictive practices in their own girlhoods, nevertheless endorse them and actively seek them for their daughters. She argues that in this "socialization for equality", simultaneously as the girl child is being socialized to accept a future containing inequalities, the mother is relearning her own place in society all over again, by going through a secondary socialization. Her complicity becomes a test of her own successful internalization. Here the suggestion is that the patriarchal system whose targets are seemingly young girls in the family is also at the same time targeting senior women and extracting their complicity. The critical question is, why does the mother do it? In part, as Papanek points out, because if she did not endorse it, she would render her own past acceptance and suffering meaningless. But one could additionally see in it the practical stance of a woman, who has through accepting and then operating the system, manoeuvred into a position of some security and control which she assumes is the only

alternative under the “given” circumstances. (Ganesh 240)

Ganesh’s ideas further consolidate my argument regarding female complicity in pressuring the younger women of the family and community into acceptance of the hegemonic discourse. The Gramscian critic Robert Bocock states that “Gramsci came to see the crucial importance of educational and legal institutions in the exercise of hegemony” (29). In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, traditional intellectuals, including many leaders of the Indian freedom struggle, within the Indian upper and middle classes adopted Western education. They used this new-found knowledge (which they imparted to women in measured quotas) as a device to establish further consensual control over the women and used the latter effectively against their own interests. The Bengali scholar Sumanta Banerjee describes the earlier educated Indian woman’s mode of connivance with the dominant discourses on education:

when they started writing, the bhadramahilas internalized the male concepts of the new womanhood. Thus Kailashbashini Devi’s *Hindu Mahilaganer Heenabastha*, which was published in 1863 and favourably reviewed in contemporary newspapers, though stressing the need for education of women to free them from superstition, writes: “From the particular nature and capacities with which God had endowed women, it is quite clear that the subservience of women is God’s will. By becoming strong therefore, women can never become independent . . . .” (165)<sup>122</sup>.

A reader functioning within the dominant reading code could also argue that it is Kalyani who is practical and not Sumi, because Sumi seems almost unaware of the harsh realities of Indian social life. But a reader reading subversively could well counter that Sumi has developed critical consciousness using her education, unlike the other older women protagonists. She epitomises women who can create a fulfilling life for themselves even with the pressures of hegemony. An ironical and critical attitude toward the dominant discourse is present in Saroja (*Tamarind Mem*), Anju (*Sister of My Heart*) and Sumi; but unlike the other two, Sumi appears a more rounded and matured character. She is not motivated by anger toward patriarchy; she is critical yet reflective; and she is the only one who appears to have enjoyed a marriage that was emotionally and intellectually fulfilling. Sumi symbolises the rational and nurturing mother, the benign face of the

Hindu mother-goddess. Her love and warmth towards her daughters is reciprocated in their strong desire to protect her. Amongst all the protagonists Sumi emerges as a very different character, a woman who believes in the idea of offspring as persons in their own right and is honest with them, sometimes bluntly so as when she tells Charu that even if Gopal ever returns to the family: “things can never be the way they were, you know that, don’t you? (Deshpande 194). She identifies herself primarily as a human being and then a woman.

Sumi never broaches the issue of her daughters’ marriages. Their education seems to be the uppermost issue on her mind. She uses her own education to find a job to support herself and her daughters. Aru’s strength stems from Sumi’s support. But surprisingly Aru perceives Sumi’s strength and acceptance of Gopal’s actions as Sumi’s weakness: “He’s our father, Ma, he’s your husband. How can you dismiss it so lightly? I don’t understand you at all?” (61). But Aru still respects and looks up to Sumi. Duffy Hutcheon points out:

there is the intentional socialization pursued by the family at every turn. It seems however, that this type of within-family education, however decisive it can be in the childhood years, is effective into adolescence only to the degree that the youths in question maintain a loving respect for their parents. (47)

With respect to the question of female complicity, one might further state that it does not merely comprise complicity on the part of the women. Complicity on the part of women is largely motivated by a strong desire of the older women to stay safely ensconced in their secure familial positions. If their offspring, especially their daughters, challenge the hegemonic discourse, they too will be forced to rouse themselves. It appears almost as an aspect of laziness in their characters, a form of apathy, that leads them to suppress from the beginning the very source from where the trouble might erupt, that is the daughters themselves. These older women do not want to shift or disturb in any way their comfort zones. Another interesting characteristic of some of the older women appears to be a trait of irrational dominance, an extremely dictatorial bent of mind, which they seem to develop once they obtain a powerful position within the household (Kumar 156). To maintain this position intact, they are willing to sacrifice the happiness of their offspring.



In Mrs. Sanyal (*Sister of My Heart*), this trait has developed to such an extent that she destroys her son Ramesh's marriage. Her exposure to business/ the outside world and the education she has received in practical terms while handling her business has not in any way developed her critical consciousness. She has subverted patriarchy to suit her own self-serving interests. In trivial issues such as visits to Sudha's natal home, she has to assert her dominance in such a manner that her authority is never challenged. Sudha narrates:

'Am I dead?' , she said to him---- not shouting, no, that wasn't her style, but her voice was cold and crackling like snakeskin. 'Am I dead that you think you can arrange whatever you want, do whatever people insist on without even asking my permission?' . . . My mother-in-law looked at him her face expressionless. And Ramesh who orders hundreds of men around every day seemed to shrink. (207)

Such dominance is the precursor to the indecisiveness that characterises not only sons like Ramesh, but also daughters such as Devi (*The Thousand Faces of Night*) and Kalyani (*A Matter of Time*). This inability to take firm stands leads ultimately to confusion and then an apathetic acceptance of parental decrees. Devi analyses her mother:

Like a veteran chess player she made her moves. I have to give her credit for her sense of timing. When she had kneaded the dough finely, thoroughly, and I was like putty in her hands, she encircled my shoulders, so ready to lean against her support, and led me to her carefully laid plans---a marriage for me, a *swayamvara*. (14)

The fictional discourse is validated by Kamala Ganesh's analysis of inter-family culture in India:

Thus socialization . . . spells out and underlines various rules about proper feminine conduct and behaviour and puts enormous pressure on girls and women to behave in ways that will not compromise family honour. It creates an ethos of marriage as inevitable, auspicious and destined. (242)

In Chapter Two Ganesh's ideas substantiate McRobbie's argument about the socialization of young girls into a culture of femininity. The novels emphasize the importance of marriage within the family discourses. Gouri excuses her cloistering of

Anju and Sudha on the grounds that she is keeping open the doors to houses that they may someday want to enter (Divakaruni 57). Even in Kalyani's household, where hegemony can sometimes be laid aside, Goda and Kalyani are found to be discussing Aru's marriage prospects (Deshpande 74-5). The narratives stress the overwhelming importance of marriage as a socio-religious duty in the lives of individuals.

Kalyani's mother Manorama had dominated Kalyani to such an extent that to accept Shripati's unnatural treatment becomes natural to her, and feelings of worthlessness haunt her throughout her life:

Kalyani is right in playing down everything but her mother's disappointment in her, for it was that which played the biggest role in her life. . . . for Manorama, she became the visible symbol of their failure to have a son. And then she fulfilled none of the dreams Manorama had for her daughter. . . . Instead there was Kalyani who could do nothing that pleased her mother. (Deshpande 151-2)

From these childhood feelings of worthlessness stem Kalyani's tendency to blame herself for her son-in-law's departure (46-7). Linked to this feeling of unworthiness is the way parental behaviour comes down through language. Within traditional Indian discourses girls are bidden to be less vocal. When Saroja protests she is instantly rebuked by her mother: "Acting too smart, that's what, too-too smart"(Badami169). Mothers use language as a weapon to control and wound daughters into submission. Manorama tells Kalyani: "You are my enemy, you were born to make my life miserable"(Deshpande 153). In contrast Sumi uses a language of friendship and honesty with her daughters. Language is used as an instrument for passing down the cultural heritage. Gramscian views on language as a cultural component are discussed by Marcia Landy:

Culture is the creation of individuals and groups in history and is, above all, grounded in the uses of language. Language is for him a "collective noun," and does not presuppose a single thing in either time or space. It is culture and philosophy. (27)

The authors use their narratives to convey that education is to a great extent a means to empowerment for women as well as men. The novels portray the educated protagonists as better equipped to fight back in adverse circumstances. Anju and Gourima (*Sister of My Heart*) and Sita (*The Thousand Faces of Night*) and Sumi (*A Matter of Time*) cope better with adversities as compared with Nalini (*Sister of My Heart*) and Kalyani (*A Matter of*

*Time*). Nalini deals with her widowhood and any other problem by constant lamentation, whereas Gourima takes on the task of shouldering the family burdens. Divakaruni's fictional discourse also hints at Nalini's lack of education as a feature of the lower socio-economic strata where lie her origins. Hearing Pishi's story about their fathers, Sudha realises:

My beautiful mother with that haughty look always on her face. My mother, hinting through a toss of her head, an angling of her elegant neck, how much better things had been in her parents' household. My mother, who was really the daughter of peasants, washing soiled clothes by a muddy river, who thought to erase her ancestry with a clever tongue. (42)

Nalini's lack of interest in education and the meagre value she attaches to it could therefore be traced back to her family background and absolute lack of exposure to education. It may be an elitist yet subversive decoding of the text; but a reader placed within a particular cultural milieu might choose to interpret the textual meaning in this manner. I refer here to a reader from the upper middle-class echelons of urban India possessing a sound education. The fiction might be considered as hinting that Sudha's lack of educational ability stems from the fact that both her parents' origins mainly lie in lower caste strata (her father Gopal's mother is a maid-servant in the ancestral Chatterjee household, Divakaruni 324) and they are not traditionally given to the pursuit of education. Given a traditional caste-based decoding of the text a reader such as myself from a specific interpretive community, might decode it in this manner.

With regard to education empowering men; acquiring of it gives them the strength to move at least physically if not mentally away from the cloistered world of their forefathers with the narrow caste and class confines. They get preference over girls in being educated but they also get to shoulder the bulk of the family burdens. Their education always comes at a price which the extended family extracts from them. Saroja's (*Tamarind Mem*) husband Vishwamoorthy has been given an elitist education which has secured him a lucrative job; but his father had also left him, at an early age, the responsibilities of looking after his widowed mother, arranging the marriage of one sister and the lifelong responsibility of another mentally retarded sister.

Sumi recalls:

*A son is born to me, dear friend, a son is born to me.*

It was Goda who sang the song at Nikhil's naming ceremony, a song full of joy, a woman sharing her joy in the birth of her son with her friends. . . .

Sumi saw it then the adoration of the male child. It must have been this way in the stable in Bethlehem, in Nanda's house on the banks of the Yamuna in Gokul. The male child belongs.

'I have no right to be here,' Sumi says to her father. 'I feel a parasite.' (Deshpande 71)

Even an educated woman like Sumi cannot help feeling the second class female status which was due to the force of patriarchal hegemony prevalent within Indian society and which idolises the male child above all else.<sup>123</sup>

Regarding the socio-cultural discourse surrounding the relevance of education in India, Padma Sarangapani writes:

Literacy and numeracy were absolutely essential for self-respect, and to escape the social stigma of being "*anpadh*". The next step was to acquire the marks of the "educated man"—social etiquette, the right speech and accent and good handwriting. . . . general knowledge and English were essential for anyone who wanted to become a "*bada admi*". The "*bada admi*" symbolizes the respectable, rich man. Children had an image of him working in an office, sitting on a chair, reading files and speaking English. (94)

Badami's novel depicts Dadda in the coveted position of the 'bada admi'; in fact during an argument with Saroja he asserts his status as a big shot (72). Mahadevan too is such an achiever: "pure blood and a healthy bank balance" (Hariharan 104). Protagonists like Dadda and Mahadevan represent the aspirations of the upper-middle class Indian males. Younger protagonists such as Mahesh (*The Thousand Faces of Night*), Ramesh and Sunil (*Sister of My Heart*) also appear to be following the hegemonic dictates of career aspirations. The younger male protagonists in Deshpande's novel are getting professional qualifications which will position them firmly within the coveted status of the 'big men.' The difference with the other novels lies in the fact that some of Deshpande's female characters too are 'big men' in that sense. Premi is a doctor, Surekha is a lawyer, Charu is

studying medicine and Aru will be a lawyer too. This novel breaks out of traditional discourses to portray a changing Indian social scene. But in spite of being a lawyer, Shripati has sacrificed his career to the patriarchal dictates of his sister. Manorama's husband, Vithalrao had paid for his education "and when the time came, Manorama had no qualms about reminding him of what he owed them, owed her"(121). The reader could interpret that his anger towards Kalyani originates from his subdued anger towards her mother whom he could never defy. After all, his colleague ended up as a judge and it is interesting to note that he marries his daughter Premi to Anil, the judge's son. Shripati embodies the harm caused by thoughtless enforcement of consensual control.

The narratives portray a Brahministic discourse. Brahmins by caste, all protagonists, male or female, look to education rather than trade/business as an income source (see Chapter Four). Women like Sita (*The Thousand Faces of Night*) and Sumi (*A Matter of Time*) employ a combination of their native caste shrewdness and education to survive. Sita employs that intelligence honed by education again in her handling of the relatives after Mahadevan's death, warding off all attempts at help, which of course would have meant information about and control of her assets by them (Hariharan 99-100). She had coped well in his lifetime too, organising his career and their finances in such a way as to secure the family for life: "She became an expert at managing things, and even more important, at moulding the moist and fragile of clay into the most effective of shapes" (ibid 102). Sumi too can rebuild her life and that of her daughters' after Gopal's departure from their lives. She gets a job, fulfils her creativity as a playwright and unlike her mother does not live in fear at her changed state in life. Kalyani (*A Matter of Time*) and Sudha (*Sister of My Heart*) illustrate the fears besetting women who do not possess the requisite education, nor the ability to use it as a lever or tool to acquire what they want for themselves.

Urban Indian society has seen a variety of changes since 1947. The most important change has been the weakening of the Indian joint family system. T.J. Scrase and Indiradevi (12) both refer to the disintegration of the Indian joint family. Referring to middle-class educated families in West Bengal, Scrase writes: "In many cases, sons have

had to move away from home in search of suitable employment. Their wives, naturally, travel with their husbands. In so doing, the traditional middle class pattern of household formation, in which the bride lived with her in-laws, is disappearing”(36). This has led to lesser constraints, less stress overall as the young couple is able to forge bonds without constant interference of family propounding hegemonic ideals regarding man-woman relationships. Professional qualifications can be pursued by both men and women of all generations without elders in extended families putting obstacles in their paths. In the early post-independence decades the newly married couples had faced greater stresses owing to higher levels of family controls. As Dr. Shakuntala Saxena analyses:

certain sociological factors come in the way to prevent social change from a straight, easy, onward move. Some of the major obstacles to social change are:

1. Conservatism of older people;
2. Cultural inertia;
3. Habits;
4. Fear of novelty;
5. Reverence for the past;
6. Vested interests, etc. (21)

In spite of the changing face of urban Indian society, family controls have by no means completely disappeared since individual nuclear units of Indian families tend to stay closely in touch with the extended families, and elders are still given much say in the lives of even those who do not stay with them. Joint families still exist in India. The novels move within an older socio-cultural discourse allowing elders greater hegemony. A modern reader even as cultural insider might experience a sense of surprise at lives like Anju’s and Sudha’s. But the literary discourse depicts the various methods of entrapment enforced by patriarchal hegemony. The sociological observations made by Saxena’s points are present in the novels.

Parental interference and advocacy of traditional systems are employed to maintain patriarchal hegemony and serve vested interests. The negative effects of this system are clearly seen in the joint family circle within which Sudha’s (*Sister of My Heart*) marriage collapses. Within the novels, other marriages flounder too, but at least couples such as

Anju and Sunil (*Sister of My Heart*); Devi and Mahesh (*The Thousand Faces of Night*), appear to make mistakes which are to some degree independent mistakes. In Hariharan's novel, Sita is able to lift Mahadevan out of a lower middle class financial rut once she builds a nuclear home base away from in-laws and even her parents whom she hardly visits (103-4). Even Saroja's (*Tamarind Mem*) marriage survives because at least she is mistress of her own home. The marital conflicts are further intensified by the pressures of the extended family. For instance, the arrival of her mentally unstable sister-in-law each summer greatly aggravates Saroja's conflicts with Dadda.

Saxena's argument is substantiated by the studies of M. Indiradevi on family structures in urban India. She asserts:

The co-residence of the parents of the spouses also exerts an impact on the nature of husband-wife relationships within the family. The presence of the spouse's parents within the family is likely to contribute to the prevalence of traditional relationships, which are authoritarian in nature, between the spouses. This happens because the parents are likely to act as custodians of traditions. (37-8)

As observed earlier this situation is slowly changing, but still exists. Saroja's marriage is full of conflicts, but does not break up. A culturally aware reader could put this down to lack of parental interference. But the plotting of his mother for sake of vested interests leads to Ramesh's divorce from Sudha. This is ironic because Dadda had Saroja out of a sense of social duty, but Ramesh was really smitten by Sudha (Divakaruni 114).

The control of the hegemonic discourse is best observed within the novels in the abrupt termination of girls' educational careers. When the issue of marriage erupts to the fore in the lives of the younger protagonists, patriarchy reveals its darker side. The first step usually taken is the sudden ceasing of the girls' pursuit of education. Marriage is used as the ultimate form of hegemonic dominance within the social system. The joint family also functions as a great hindrance to the education of girls. Saroja's (*Tamarind Mem*) education is further hindered by the combined interference of her extended family, especially her grandfather, Rayaru. Saroja's acid tongue and her baiting of her grandfather Rayaru leads to closure of all avenues for medical studies (171). Her

comments about the rightness of her grandmother Putti Aji's actions in financially humiliating Rayaru, (see Chapters One and Three) a womaniser, threaten the power of patriarchy. The retaliation is swift. Her education is considered responsible for her tongue. What is ironic is the censure of Putti Aji whose forthrightness Saroja admires:

‘Yo-yo-yo, what does that chit of a girl think of herself? Learns a bit of English and see what happens, becomes as bold as a white woman’. . . . My grandmother has a vocabulary of words more foul than those used by a beggar denied alms. She follows none of the rules of womanly behaviour, so why should she set any for me? (164)

A form of ‘selective hegemony’ is seen in this instance. Putti Aji too functions within systems of vested interests. She desires to keep the family *status quo* intact as well as her unique position in the family hierarchy. She does not want a verbal autonomy similar to the one that she has achieved, in any other woman within the family. She prevents it by fostering patriarchal dominance according to her convenience. Mankekar's source, Renuka stresses unity within family as a vital feature of the Indian socio-cultural discourse:

Renuka insisted that “outside influences” were responsible for families breaking up . . . . Indeed, some of what she said resonated with what I had been hearing all my life: that Westernization (what she glossed as “foreign influence”) was responsible for women “going astray” and “breaking up” families. (157)

Renuka exhibits the classic Indian dogma of ‘Western Evil, Oriental Goodness’(see Chapter Two) and moves within the ideas assimilated by her through the patriarchal discourse. She goes on to say that Western families do not exhibit the unity prevalent in Indian families. Mankekar's query as to the role of women in these Indian families elicits the response that it is the woman's responsibility to keep the family united. It is the view of what many middle-class people feel ‘ought’ to be in family structures. The authors appear more closely connected to the social reality of urban India through their fiction. What they manage to extract from the social reality is the complete rule of vested interests, survival of the fittest, and in the fictional examples, the most manipulative and at best an ambiguous unity is observed within extended and often nuclear family situations. All of this may be said to stem from the original lack of unity between the



married couples which later divides the families into camps. Saroja's (*Tamarind Mem*) parents in a sense are exceptions to this rule; but that could also be decoded as a subversive authorial portrayal of a marriage which functions smoothly because the wife is manipulative enough to safeguard herself as a priority by offering no opinions at all:

There is minimal conflict when a woman accepts the man's dominant image of her.

However, those women tend to be most effective who are conscious to a large degree of what they are doing and in doing so are really moving out of this model, while keeping up the pretense that they are not. They cater to the image of the superior importance of men.

At the same time, they have developed enough sense of their own rights and abilities.

The Indian woman, . . . learns to manipulate the more powerful man in a manner that is subtle and frequently not observed by those who are being manipulated.

(Kumar 153)

Women such as Saroja's mother enter into minimal conflicts with their husbands because they do not protest at the injustices of hegemony. Sita also faces fewer conflicts as she manipulates within hegemony and Gouri (*Sister of My Heart*) merely submits to the discourse. Protagonists such as Anju (*Sister of My Heart*) and Saroja (*Tamarind Mem*) get into conflicts as they protest the unfairness of patriarchal discourses. But neither Saroja or Anju appears to find even the compromised happiness of their mothers. The reader could be left wondering if the authors advocate compromise as a 'golden mean' to marital peace.

The fictional discourse precisely illustrates the subtle insider/outsider status of such women, who move outside the discourse by manipulating it in such a manner that they appear as complete cultural insiders. The maternal training has been well-imbibed by Saroja's sister, Lalitha. Lalitha has analysed the father well. She plays up to him to achieve her goals and advises Saroja to do the same: "Cry a little, beg, wheedle. How does it hurt you? Appa feels that he has the power to refuse and you get what you want. All men are like that"(188). Saroja's caustic honesty is too anti-hegemonic, and draws attention to itself, causing Saroja irreparable harm in a male-dominated social structure. Here again role-playing is observed as a conscious survival technique. Lalli knows that she will otherwise get no benefits from a highly conservative father. Those that spurn

these roles face the maximum problems. A culturally alien reader may decode it as the innate dishonesty within the cultural discourse, while an insider might empathise with what might be perceived as necessary subterfuge to keep social fabrics intact.

The youthful marriages of the female protagonists combined with their terminated education appear to contain messages of rigid domination. Within the traditional Indian socio-cultural discourse, youth is considered to be flexible as well as callow and vulnerable whereas age is automatically deemed to confer sagacity. Therefore protagonists married young will likely grow into docile wives. This, combined with lack of education, renders them absolutely subservient, further strengthening the shackles of consensual control systems. The differences between the temperaments of Kalyani (*A Matter of Time*) and Saroja (*Tamarind Mem*) illustrate these perspectives. Saroja is: “too tall, too educated”(Badami 175), whereas Kalyani is very young and uneducated. But the authors subversively encode within their fiction the idea that unhappiness is a woman’s lot in these marriages arranged to serve specific familial interests. The difference in educational levels is seen in the differing reactions and the ironic and often angrily sarcastic arguments which form a part of Saroja’s marital discourse; whereas Kalyani accepts complete silence as her lot. They are both different from Deshpande’s creation Aru, symbolising the compassionate yet forthright, contemporary Indian woman. Aru, at eighteen, has formulated her opinions to the extent of questioning and rebuking her father openly. But the changes within middle class ideology especially amongst ‘organic’ intellectuals’ (see Chapter Four) are seen in Gopal’s ability to accept and understand his daughter’s censure and the anger and sorrow underlining it: “Aru is an adversary, holding her hostility before her like a weapon. A sword, scrubbed to a beautiful silvery sheen, sharp-edged, ready for war”(49).

The majority of the female protagonists, even if they are educated, are not allowed by their natal families to follow any kind of stable careers or choose a profession because it might result in them forming too many opinions of their own thereby rendering them unsuitable as traditional good wives. Nalini refuses to let Sudha attend college saying:

“What good is that going to do?”. . . “It will just put wayward ideas into her head” (Divakaruni 73). Indiradevi states:

Age is a crucial factor in the formation of images in self and crystallization of values, attitudes, beliefs and in the development of one’s own personality. . . Women who are educated and employed and thus enter marriage at a later age are likely to have an egalitarian ethos than those who wed at an early age. (77)

Within a similar socio-cultural locale, Deshpande’s novel moves beyond the other texts and depicts Sumi and her sister, Premi, as appearing to have escaped this repression of themselves as individuals who could attain certain educational goals. In their natal and marital homes, at least, their education has never been interfered with, and Premi goes on to study medicine and be a doctor. But they have seen and empathised with the oppressive marriage of their mother and felt the sufferings of her stifled self. Sumi recalls: “one fearful memory of Kalyani standing in the centre of that room, striking herself on her face with both her hands, the muscles on her neck rigid like taut ropes, the veins on her temples standing out”(184). Neither Sumi nor Premi have been able to distance themselves completely from their silent yet disturbed childhood home. Upon visiting her natal home, Premi reflects

how they are always on the same side of the invisible dotted lines that mark out alliances and divides in families . . . And it makes no difference that I am now a successful professional, mother of a seven-year old son, wife of a prosperous lawyer. The moment I come home, all this dwindles into nothing and I can feel myself sliding back into adolescence, getting once again under the skin of that frightened child Premi who’s always waiting here for me. (17)

Acquiring professional qualifications has not compensated for Premi’s lack of self-esteem, the feeling of being the unwanted child, the guilty one:

The baby was crying. Was that her explanation? Her justification? Did she blame me for what happened? And was that the reason . . . for all those painful nudges, the sharp nips and hard slaps that were so much a part of my childhood . . . (141)

After hearing how her mother kept stressing the baby’s cries after the loss of her brother; Premi always considers herself responsible, as she was the crying infant. Duffy Hutcheon remarks that socialization is

a social process of system adaptation which is incredibly complex because it is both ongoing throughout life and intertwined with biological maturation. It is also reciprocal in that it inevitably affects all participants, and it is often unplanned and unrecognized by the influencer and the influenced alike. (45)

She also goes on to state that: “. . . because of the very fact of its potency and irreversibility of its effects, the family has the potential for being the most destructive of all the agencies of socialization”(49). For Premi, the childhood home is the repository of all unhappy memories. Yet again Deshpande's novel moves beyond traditional boundaries by portraying Premi's husband, Anil, and her in-laws as representing points of security and stability for her. By contrast, Sumi as a young girl appears almost unscathed, keeping her sense of self intact. It is seen in her ability to give herself heart and soul to Gopal. But Sumi gives everything to Gopal, offering up her life and education as well. Shagufa Kapadia asserts : “Especially in the Indian context, women construct their sense of self largely in terms of the relational paradigm and traditional gender roles that in turn reinforce the code of living for others”(265).<sup>124</sup>

Deshpande depicts yet another side to fulfilling educational and career aspirations through the character of Surekha, a lawyer, feminist, and Aru's mentor. Within the fictional discourse, Surekha is a complete cultural outsider in her choice of lifestyle and views. But through her portrayal of Surekha, Deshpande appears to question the excessive freedom of mind and body it grants and the ambiguous support it lends to the human quest for happiness. Aru comes upon Surekha one evening at home : “Aru is not so naïve as to imagine that women don't drink, but to think of Surekha sitting alone here with a drink fills her somehow with dismay. And pity”(206). The reader could interpret that Deshpande is also questioning the real road to happiness. Maybe the authors are not even suggesting a 'golden mean'. Sumi appears to have had found true conjugal happiness in an egalitarian relationship, but that seems to the reader like a fantasy that has shattered. Even Premi's apparently satisfying marriage it is clear, has her son Nikhil as the fulcrum (138).

Deshpande's narrative portrays Gopal as an enlightened individual who does not function within typical male prejudices. Unfortunately, the reader experiences a sense of bewilderment at the sudden and almost casual abandonment of his family by a man who appears to contain within himself elements of the Hindu ideal of '*Ardhnareshwar*' (see Chapter Three). Intellectualising the aloneness inherent in all human life, Gopal asserts: "Suddenly I stopped believing in the life I was leading, suddenly it seemed unreal to me and I knew I could not go on"(41). Gopal seems to have taken his academic learning to an extreme. He philosophises and intellectualises his relationship with his family to an extent whereby he faces esoteric questions of the Hindu philosophy of all the world being an illusion and ends by abandoning them. He appears at one with the hegemonic ideal of seeking the male vested interest; but violates the traditional patriarchal discourse by abandoning his duties as father and husband.

Even as an intellectual, Gopal appears to fail in Gramscian terms. He over-intellectualises his emotions thereby ultimately losing connection with all that is meaningful in terms of family. Gramsci writes: "The intellectual's error consists in believing that one can know without understanding . . ."(Bocock 36).<sup>125</sup> If the family is taken as a nation and if the father using the dominant discourse is taken as its head along with the mother; the children are the populace whom a leader such as Gopal has failed since the relationship does not become 'one of representation' (Bocock 37). Gramsci goes on to say that "in the absence of such a nexus, the relations between the intellectual and the people-nation are reduced to relationships of a purely bureaucratic and formal order; the intellectuals become a caste, or a priesthood"(ibid). Gopal is no leader figure. Even after Sumi's death he appears to be a young boy solaced by the girl Aru and the old woman Kalyani whose strengths let them pander to his need to seek further esoteric answers to life: "Aru says, echoing her grandmother, 'Yes, Papa, you go. We'll be all right, we'll be quite all right, don't worry about us' "(246). Most readers would analyse his actions as embodying intellectual selfishness at its extreme. Readers using a negotiated or subversive code can see in him the quintessential pampered Indian man using his intellectualism to shield himself from hard-core duties of a father and husband. He is constantly subverting traditional discourses even that of father and protector and giving freedom to Aru so that

he has no responsibilities to shoulder. Even if he can be considered a believer in egalitarianism, he is not giving power to Aru so much as shirking his responsibilities as a man who claimed to have cared for his daughters. His whole philosophy of life appears to be one of indulging his intellectual and spiritual needs at any cost.

Sumi muses: "Gopal and I never thought of our daughters' marriage, never as a problem anyway . . ." (Deshpande 124). She realises she and Gopal have not been perceptive in their understanding of the Indian social situation (see Chapter Three) regarding daughters. Saraswathi comments:

Noteworthy is the fact that, despite the shift in educational and career goals of girls over historical time, and across social class, with clear expectations that the girls will be able to or even be expected to have a job, gender socialization, even in the upper middle social class is unambiguous. Girls are socialized to subsume their personal aspirations to the goals of marriage and to the expectations of the family into which they will marry.<sup>126</sup> (220)

In Gramscian terms, it may be argued that change has to originate from the home with parents rejecting gender-discrimination. Parents have to function as organic intellectuals lending their support to the formation of a new hegemony where they encourage their offspring towards independence regardless of sex. Deshpande points the way with her creation of a mother like Sumi and daughters like Aru and Charu who are thinking individuals in their own right from a very young age. Like Aru, Anju (*Sister of My Heart*) is a principled and forthright person, but due to lack of exposure and family support Anju's principles often dwindle into mere manifestations of rage. Kamini (*Tamarind Mem*) is another good example of the independence of the girl-child, but she cannot free herself from the debilitating dependence on parental approval. A rational conflict-free relationship between parents would go a long way in fostering strong-minded, independent children.

The question arises of over-educated parents moving away from social realities within which they are culturally rooted. The reader could also decode this as an authorial indication of the possibility of creation of a less hegemonic upper-middle class society

not obsessively focused on marriage and gender-defined relationships and prioritising a knowledge based culture. It could appear almost a return to the golden age of Hinduism in which daughters were not unwanted for the reasons which Pandit Altekar cites:

They could be initiated in Vedic studies and were entitled to offer sacrifices to gods; . . . the marriage of the daughter was not a difficult problem; it was often solved by the daughter herself. The dread of possible widowhood did not very much weigh upon the minds of parents; . . . remarriage was allowed by society and was fairly common. (5)

The fictional discourse reveals the lack of altruism in the parental motives for educating their offspring. Saraswathi remarks how

the social setting of the middle-class male children and youth is characterized by high parental control and involvement, a highly competitive academic setting and high career aspirations set by parents. Having spent a major part of their lives so far with their nose on the grinding stone, as it were, youth, even in their late-twenties, evince signs of being torn between family obligations and individual needs. (215)

Gopal and Sumi as parents could be model parents for deconstructing the hegemonic discourse, but outside of the fictional discourse, dismantling of societal hegemony will take a while to come. More common in the Indian cultural discourse would be parents like Mr. Mazumdar (*Sister of My Heart*) or Sita (*The Thousand Faces of Night*), dominating tyrants, or ambiguous frustrated parents such as Saroja (*Tamarind Mem*), who move a few steps beyond hegemony and no further.

A sense of having given the children some exceptional gift or conferred an extraordinary favour by clothing, feeding, and especially educating them is observed in the parental attitudes within the fictional discourse. Both Ramesh's mother and Sunil's father (*Sister of My Heart*) exhibit these traits. A constant sense of expectation on behalf of the parents characterise the parent-child exchanges. During an argument with Sunil, his father shouts: "So this is what you have learned in America, how to defy your father? Who is it that sent you there, I'd like to know? Who bought your ticket? Who paid all your expenses?" (173). The self-serving motivation of parental actions at times appears to

relegate to secondary status the importance of regarding their children as distinct beings with individual rights and seems to regard them as appendages to the more important lives of their elders.

Sometimes, the younger protagonists are educated so that their parents may vicariously fulfil their own dreams. The emotional pressure of expectations experienced by the offspring is enormous. Kamini's situation illustrates this argument: "Ma wanted me to major in science. An engineer or doctor made money, no need to get married then" (Badami 121). Saroja's dreams are vicarious as well as contradictory leading to traumatic effects of the inter-family discourse on Kamini.

To explore further the issue of education as a means of personal development and social betterment, the situations of certain protagonists can be analysed. The analysis of the protagonists can be differentiated on the premise of gender. For male protagonists such as Sunil, Ramesh (*Sister of My Heart*), Mahesh (*The Thousand Faces of Night*), education provided them with the basic ability to provide for themselves financially and thus gave them a certain modicum of social independence. This course of their lives is again contained by hegemonic discourse. Stressing the differences in the manner of rearing children of opposite sexes, the Indian sociologist Jyotsna Rajvanshi states:

Every young man knows that he must become concerned about his occupational choice and its resolution. The parallel social expectation for a young woman is that she will marry and raise a family, can expect to work regularly or intermittently full or part-time but she is not required to make her plans accordingly. (108)

There is, by implication, a gender-based difference in the way the male and female protagonists respond to acquiring education. It appears more as an economic and status-orientated necessity for the men as compared to a prospect for deconstructing the patriarchal hegemony for the women. Adopting a subversive code, a reader may analyse that Mahesh (*The Thousand Faces of Night*) is an upcoming young executive and his education has been geared toward making a career. It has not broadened the scope of his intellectual capacities in any way. His idea of a wife's function is that of a child producer



and a decorative appendage and hostess further useful for career advancement (ibid 71-4). Referring to urban middle and upper-middle class sections of Indian society, Rajvanshi remarks that “the traditional patriarchal expectations regarding the family roles have not undergone much change. . . Higher education is favoured by male members but for employment some resistance is still shown due to their traditional attitudes toward women”(9). Mahesh’s professional education has not altered his essential traditional Hindu male conception of the woman’s status. The discourse he has been reared within is one in which “the identity of girls is submerged in prescribed roles, clear cut and limited aspirations (to be a good daughter-in-law and wife); selflessness and a network of relationships that define their role and self-esteem”(Saraswathi 217).

Dadda (*Tamarind Mem*) and Shripati (*A Matter of Time*) follow the hegemonic role of being the dominant male and satisfying the economic needs of the family. The emotional and intellectual aspects of inter-family relationships are ascribed negligible importance. Saroja reflects:

Dadda lives by rules. Just as he makes sure that nothing, not a syllable, in the *Handbook for Railway Officers* is ever violated, so does he follow an unwritten book on the duties of a Brahmin father. he is determined to avoid all the mistakes his own father made. But he is a good son, respecting his father no matter what he did, and so he never tells me what those mistakes were. . . When he died he left Dadda, the oldest, to gather up all the pieces. I marry a man who is already old, who fulfils his obligation to society by acquiring a wife. I am merely a symbol of that duty completed. (Badami 227-8)

Older male protagonists like Dadda and Shripati make use of their education as a mere means of livelihood and betterment of their families’ economic and social standards. Dadda “is an affectionate father, imaginative too. More imaginative than he is as a husband”(Badami 222); unlike Shripati who hardly converses with his growing daughters. Premi informs Anil, her husband: “My father never spoke to me until I was ten”(Deshpande 18) and Anil is disbelieving. What is common between the fathers is that (in spite of their engineering and legal qualifications) neither of them has used his education to broaden his emotional outlook or provide the much-needed emotional sustenance to his family as a whole. These men are located in an earlier more

conservative sociological framework which would further hinder any moves toward liberal thinking. The male protagonists on the whole appear to have fallen into a comfortable rut *vis a vis* education. Most seem to consider it a means of economic sustenance or social and financial mobility and sometimes ego satisfaction. Most of the male characters do not seem to consider education as opportunities or intellectual gifts which they want to share with their female counterparts. With their education, they are very much the traditional intellectuals investing in the hegemonic discourse.

The women protagonists are indoctrinated into an acceptance of an exploitative discourse through the cultural education which occurs in their childhood homes. As discussed in Chapter Three, it takes place through the use of myths and legends wherein the desired values of femaleness are constantly stressed. Kapadia claims that “cultural ideas of ‘femaleness’ are largely inferred from social roles, values, behavioural expectations and socialization patterns. In the Indian-Hindu culture, the category of woman is considered a primary cultural construct . . .” (Kapadia 265). The narratives show a certain amount of clear demarcation between the protagonists’ Westernised school education and culturally rooted home education. But as the teachers have absorbed a similar socio-cultural discourse the hegemonic ideals infiltrate the formal educational discourse, often in negative aspects. Kamini (*Tamarind Mem*) is intimidated not only by Linda Ayah’s nightly ghost and demon stories (“You bad girl, wait you, a fish *bhooth*<sup>127</sup> will breathe poison over your face at night” Badami 57) but also by her teacher’s moral harangues on the fury of the Lord. Kamini learns that within the Indian middle class discursive ethos, ‘virgin’ “was a bad word” and her teacher Miss Manley’s anger erupts making her sit under a desk: “the dustbin is too good for you, . . . You stay down there where the Lord cannot see your sinful face”(34). The repressive hegemony erupts, decreeing that any discussion of sexuality is immoral. William Dalrymple, the travel historian observes:

But there is a conflict here between the ancient Indian culture that gave rise to the Kama Sutra. For India, once the land of the Kama Sutra, is now one of the world’s most buttoned-up and prudish places. Despite a dazzling variety of Sanskrit terms for every shade of sexual arousal, no modern Indian language has a word for orgasm. . . India has for thirty years resisted the onslaught of the sexual revolution which swept much of the rest of the world in the sixties. (1999 148)

The highly manipulative, self-motivated aspect of hegemony is best observed in light of the above argument. The male-dominated Indian socio-cultural discourses on sexuality adopted the Victorian prudery of the nineteenth century. Having found in it an excellent system of consensual control on society in general, they resisted the cultural absorption of the later liberalisation of Western women through education and increased awareness. This borrowed Victorian prudery is now claimed as an authentic feature of native Indian culture. Ien Ang remarks that “. . . what counts as ‘local’ and therefore ‘authentic’ is not a fixed content, but subject to change and modification as a result of domestication of imported cultural goods”(1996 154-5). The novels portray the postcolonial culture as still in the throes of the colonial discourse that stifles personal development.

Deshpande again moves away from the fictional norm in portraying Gopal as a man unafraid to acknowledge that he had enjoyed and gloried in his wife's sexuality. He uses the term '*Ananda*' (89) or joy to describe his physical union with her. To him Sumi is never merely a female body functioning as a sexual being within a wife's persona. She is a human being with her unique and special dignity, as are his daughters. Within the fictional discourse based on a hegemonic Indian culture, Gopal is unique in that he can say: "I knew I needed her, her warmth, her humanness, her womanness"(68). He is portrayed as an unusual Indian man who took real delight in nurturing his daughters mentally and physically and revelled in it: " 'Why did you have children?' I could have answered that question: 'I wanted it all.' And I did everything----caring for my babies, tending them, caressing them—with joy and passion"(ibid). Deshpande uses her literary skill to illustrate through Gopal what the complete Hindu man could be but is not; Gopal also falters, ultimately reverting to hegemony in his self-absorption.

Use of a subversive reading code helps discern the constant note of individualistic and egoistic concerns in Gopal's temperament. His education has liberated him from the traditional thought processes of hegemony as regards the near-universal cultural preference for male children. But here is an individual almost completely concerned with his own intellectual processing of ideas and philosophies. There is always an emphasis on what he himself feels, rather than about them (Sumi and him) as a unit. He also tends to

discuss his enjoyment and pleasure in relationships from his perspective and therefore he leaves home under the force of his ideas, almost casually discarding his family life. His soul-searching appears to be a route for escaping vital householder duties: "It's a kind of illness, a virus, perhaps, which makes me capable of functioning as a full human being, as a husband and father. . ."(Deshpande 41).

Deshpande again steps aside from depicting traditional rather pompous men to portraying new shades to the Indian man especially with the character of Rohit, who loves Aru simply as an individual and is emotionally educated enough to acknowledge it. As he looks at Aru, Sumi is

struck by the look on Rohit's face. His pose of casual sophistication has fallen away from him and he looks wholly vulnerable. But there is nothing ridiculous about this lover's look on his face. On the contrary, his consciousness of his vulnerability gives him both dignity and stature. (169)

The younger generation such as Hrishi and Rohit represent the positive side of the contemporary social discourse involving the urban upper- middle class Hindu male. Their education combined with the liberal socio-cultural discourse within which they operate enable them to view man-woman relationships outside the scope of the hegemonic ideals. Their relationships with Aru and Charu are warm and friendly. What is vital is that in spite of their romantic feelings toward the girls, these young men manage to maintain a good and healthy friendship with them based on mutual respect and liking. Deshpande's older male characters appear selfish rather than hegemonic. But amongst them too, Deshpande contrasts the warm and affectionate Satya (Goda's husband) with the rigid and undemonstrative Shripati, thereby illustrating that human nature cannot be classified merely on the basis of external factors such as caste, class, age, community and education.

The ultimate victims of the dominant discourse are however, always the offspring. Even financially and socially stable characters like Dadda (*Tamarind Mem*) do not appear to invest much thought in long-term planning of their children's lives. Even if they have accessed education, the older female protagonists are rarely allowed financial control

except for some like Sita (*The Thousand Faces of Night*) and Mrs. Sanyal (*Sister of My Heart*). Both are widows and the latter misuses her money as an instrument of dominance. The novels often portray a decline in the female protagonists' standard of life; especially within Divakaruni's text. Divakaruni appears to be outlining the Hindu culture of fatalism: "the Hindu beliefs of karma, the idea of destiny and time, and dharma, duty, act as ameliorative influences to take the sting out of the secondary status" (Kumar 147). In upper-middle class Hindu families, the concept of economic freedom is very rarely attached to the notion of women's education. Intelligent and capable women like Gourima (*Sister of My Heart*) and Sita (*The Thousand Faces of Night*) are never consciously taught to handle finances by their natal families and also their conjugal ones. They must learn by hard experience as does Saroja (*Tamarind Mem*).

Furthermore, the extended family exercises a demand on finances which leads to lowering the socio-economic standards of life in the nuclear home. If a woman protests: "self assertion becomes selfishness, independent decision-making is perceived as disobedience" (Saraswathi 217).<sup>128</sup> The patriarchal discourse places the needs of those linked by paternal blood as above the needs of mere wives and children. In the Chatterjee home (*Sister of My Heart*), Gourima provides for Nalini and Sudha at great cost, in the long run harming the financial and emotional interests of her own daughter. It might be said that Bijoy's whims of assimilating Gopal's family into the Chatterjee household irretrievably harmed the interests of the direct Chatterjee descendants. Nandita Chaudhary remarks that "familism, in contrast to individualism, is a significant reality for Indian families. The term implies that affiliation to the family is a sentiment that pervades almost all social interactions"(152).<sup>129</sup> Every aspect of Anju's life is influenced by the presence of Sudha. Her marriage suffers and her aunt and cousin are an added burden on the already straitened family finances which ironically Gopal's coming had further squandered. Pishi recounts: "Oh he had great ideas, Gopal, but they were like unbaked clay pots. You went to fetch water, lowered them into the lake, and all you were left with was mud in your hands"(29). Anju has also absorbed the inter-family cultural discourse to the extent that she never analyses the harm caused to her immediate family by Sudha's family; instead she considers Sudha: "my other half. The sister of my heart" (12). For

Gouri, upkeep of the discourse laid down by her husband matters beyond the need to logically plan out a successful and financially secure existence for her only child. This discourse empowers Bijoy even in death: “she believed that a woman’s first duty was to support her husband”(30).

No amount of education appears to teach most of the parents to construct concrete plans ensuring financial and emotional security in the lives of their offspring. Similarly husbands relegate married life to a secondary status. The men in the process of doing their duties to their natal families often fall into the habit of ignoring the more pressing needs of their wives and children. They appear bogged down in the tradition of discharging the debts of their fathers. Trapped within a doctrine of duty, members of a fossilized society supporting what Gramsci terms: “this leaden burden” of “great historical and cultural traditions” (Forgacs 278), they look to the past instead of their present and their future as symbolised by their wives and children.

Very few women are like Sita (*The Thousand Faces of Night*), able to wrest complete financial control within a patriarchal system. But Hariharan twists the fictional narrative to portray the irony of the ultimate triumph of the hegemonic discourse through Sita’s actions. She defeats her own self and is corrupted by her own power. A reader could enter into a subversively gendered reading of the text. The male ambivalence toward woman as Goddess has been elaborated in Chapter Three. Sita could to be taken as personifying a form of Kali the Goddess as destroyer; drunk on her own power. The question arises of perceiving financially powerful women like Sita and Mrs. Sanyal (*Sister of My Heart*) as a danger to the standardised socio-cultural of woman as mother/nurturer, reflecting an omnipresent fear within the Hindu cultural psyche. William Dalrymple refers to *Parashakti*, a South Indian version of Kali:

The great Goddess—for the world was created when she opened her eyes and it is Destroyed whenever she blinks. . . . Yet *Parashakti* is Life itself, she is also Death. She can destroy all she creates, and for this reason many of her devotees choose to worship her as *Pancapretasanasina*, She who is Seated on a Throne of Five Corpses. (1999 218)

Most maternal figures within the texts; Sita (*The Thousand Faces of Night*), Manorama (*A Matter of Time*), Mrs. Sanyal, Nalini and ironically even Gourima (*Sister of My Heart*) portray various forms of the destructive mother harming her own creation, her child. Hegemony provides the weapon turning mother against child. The child's greatest protector becomes the one person who causes the greatest harm. Sudha's (*Sister of My Heart*) situation supports the above argument. The greatest crime on her is perpetrated by her own mother who discontinues her studies after high school and ensures that Sudha falls prey to the unscrupulous and suffocating domination of her mother-in-law after marriage. But neither Devi, Sita's daughter, nor Sudha is able to resist maternal pressure by an assertion of her self and voice her own needs. The fictional discourse provides insight into a condition symptomatic amongst Indian middle class families. Rajvanshi explains:

The type of upbringing of children, their education, the freedom of movement without restraints, the taboos imposed on them and the privileges they enjoy determine what they will be in future. Thus, the parents specially the mother has a great influence on her children, specially the daughter. (112)

Behind female submission to the exploitative discourse of the marital family lies an awareness, a knowledge that their natal family has not really empowered them financially. Devi (*The Thousand Faces of Night*) eloping with Gopal is perhaps the exception, realising that her financial strength as the only heir of wealthy parents. Otherwise, the fictional discourse explores the social reality of the casual acceptance of post-marital exploitation of women. Regarding women's economic empowerment the narratives illustrate the faithful adherence to the ancient laws of Manu stressing the lifetime disempowerment of women.<sup>130</sup>

Anju is also coerced into early marriage and promised that her husband will 'allow' her to study (Divakaruni 103). The narratives emphasise that while education is a male birthright, it is, seemingly, an important favour conferred, often reluctantly, on the women. Because of the changing times, Anju fares better than Pishi, whose urge to study after widowhood earned her a slap from her father (262). T.S. Saraswathi remarks:

Something akin to a cold feet syndrome is evident in upper middle class parents'

attempts to adopt more indulgent and permissive child-rearing practices as a reaction to their own strict upbringing. However, when young people transgress basic social values, parents take recourse to the old world values and practices to draw the line. (225)

The contradictory Indian socio-cultural attitudes toward female education are visible in the ambiguous parental stances adopted by the older protagonists. Kamini wonders: “Why did Ma push me so hard to study study study if she was planning to get me married, decorate me with useless jewellery and zari<sup>131</sup> saris?” (Badami 121). The novels also depict the contradictory parental pressure on the children to make all possible effort to study and excel. Kamini narrates: “Ma was ambitious for Roopa and me. ‘You have to be one step ahead of the rest of the world,’ she declared, ‘better than the best. Don’t let anybody be ahead of you’ ” (119).

Middle-class Indian parents set extraordinarily high achievement standards for their children, as they look upon education as a means to constant betterment of life, an almost certain way to success and financial stability. There seems to exist within the middle class a fear of joining the ranks of a lower socio-economic stratum, a fear which might prove only too real if they lose their moderate financial strength. The sense of being well-off is experienced as a precarious state, only barely separated from those less fortunate. This points to a certain vulnerability within the social structure: namely, fear of losing their status in the hierarchy. Amitav Ghosh’s middle-class protagonist in *The Shadow Lines* clearly states this fear upon visiting the house of a relative belonging to a lower socio-economic strata:

It is true, of course, that I could not see that landscape or anything like it from my own window, but its presence was palpable everywhere in our house; I had grown up with it. It was that landscape that lent the note of hysteria to my mother’s voice when she drilled me for my examinations. . . I knew perfectly well that all it would take was a couple of failed examinations to put me where my relative was. (131-2)

Purnima Mankekar also reflects on the social relevance of Ghosh’s perceptions of Indian middle classness stating that this idea outlined by Ghosh’s novel: “. . . has helped me



understand my own nervousness when I visit relatives who are considerably poorer than my family; it reminds me of my anxieties about exams, “doing well,” being successful” (114). In contemporary India, education wields its own special power and women like Saroja (*Tamarind Mem*) and Sita (*The Thousand Faces of Night*) who have had to struggle to assert their own positions in both their natal and marital homes understand the importance of at least ensuring that a daughter is technically qualified enough not to be absolutely at the mercy of another family. In case of the male protagonists, education provides future social and financial security and also ensures good marital prospects by virtue of social and financial standing. According to M. Indiradevi:

education is the greatest known catalytic agent for social change . . .

Since most societies place a high value on those who are educated, the level of education is also considered as an important measure of the social status of an individual with skills of knowledge, communication and participation. Hence education influences conjugal decision-making process and it is considered to be a highly consistent source of marital power.<sup>132</sup> (19)

There is never any sense of individuality inculcated in the offspring, no concept of the self-interest as being distinct from that of the parents and the extended family. The concept of absolute parental authority is also linked with the ancient Indian educational culture of the Guru’s control being absolute. Padma Sarangapani observes that “the teacher’s authority, like that of the father, was to be feared and respected. By casting the teacher-student relationship in the parent-child mould, teacher’s actions were sanctified and placed beyond the purview of children”(Sarangapani 89). But the Guru’s control was solely for educational purposes and a limited time period; whereas the parental authority over the lives of their offspring lasted well into the adulthood of the latter. As observed within the narratives, family as a control mechanism has a continuous existence.

The veiled hostilities between the protagonists within the texts stem from the caste, class and educational attributes they possess. They do not indulge in an honest airing of grievances. All verbal interactions are highly complicated. The reader is left with the impression that had they vocalised their problems more freely without such rigid adherence to the decencies dictated by the dominant discourse, they might have lessened

some of the emotional stress on themselves and their families, particularly their offspring. This stress is illustrated by Kamini's expression of her feelings regarding her childhood home which she felt metaphorically contained: "unseen bodies of water . . . where the currents were dangerous and whirlpools lurked"(122).

The families, in the novels under analysis, occupy a particular social stratum. They are upper caste (all in fact have Brahmin protagonists) and upper middle class. In such families, education is given precedence over other factors as an indicator of social status. As discussed in Chapter Four, Broomfield defines such a class, which gives precedence above all to its social honour as the '*Bhadralok*.' The Chatterjee family (*Sister of My Heart*) is a perfect example of the Bengali '*Bhadralok*'. The hierarchical attitudes of their class are seen in their desperate attempts to hang on to the tattered remnants of their dignity in spite of financial setbacks. Sumi's family (*A Matter of Time*) is similar in certain ways. The basic background of most protagonists can be defined using the '*Bhadralok*' concept. They have a certain financial and social standing. Most of the protagonists are from families who have ancestral wealth or are white-collar professionals. Most of these families have also had access to Western education. For instance, Deshpande's novel is peopled with lawyers, doctors, university lecturers et cetera; Divakaruni's protagonists are software professionals, civil engineers and such; Hariharan's novel similarly places the males as corporate executives married to women who possess university qualifications and Badami depicts characters such as Dadda who is an engineer holding a senior position in the Railways, Kamini who is a doctoral candidate and Saroja who also holds a degree in Science. They all meet the criteria of what Bengalis specifically describe as *Bhadralok*.

Such a class also tends to camouflage the most unpleasant family interactions and problems with a veneer of good manners and respectability. Mrs. Sanyal's domineering nature, Sunil's father's abusive treatment of his wife (*Sister of My Heart*), Mahesh's callous disregard of Devi's feelings, her mother-in-law Parvati's leaving home (*The Thousand Faces of Night*), Dadda's (*Tamarind Mem*) general neglect of Saroja as well as the latter's affair with a mechanic are all pushed to the background in the greater

importance given to appearances and the smooth functioning of the externalities of family life.

Most of the male protagonists in the novels follow the hegemonic doctrine of contemporary India as practised by the middle classes prioritising education and careers. Deshpande's is the only novel which depicts the changing Indian urban society where many young girls are now reared to focus on their careers by their parents. All three of Sumi's daughters are seen focusing on professional careers. In fact their father's lack of interest in his teaching career appears to motivate them to pursue their own with greater vengeance. Gopal is an unusual character whose entire attention does not appear to be focused on seeking to further his career and obtaining further material benefits (Deshpande 41).

The authors' own educational backgrounds and that of their immediate families are pertinent to this chapter. They are upper-middle class Indian women creating their fiction within a familiar socio-cultural locale and writing within a specific socio-cultural discourse. They base their fiction on their knowledge of a cross-section of urban Indian society. T.Vijaya Kumari asserts:

These novels are mainly addressed to 'us' postcolonial Indians who, as one of the writers (Shashi Tharoor) puts it, "move to the strains of a morning raga in perfect evening dress", or who, in the words of Advani,<sup>133</sup> "admire Beethoven and Bhimsen Joshi". These novels are not self-consciously Indian—neither their language nor their form betray any anxiety about their identity. Yet the sensibility and the aesthetic of these texts are so specific ('parochial') that only those who share their contextual situation can fully appreciate their complete meaning.<sup>134</sup> (188)

The narratives it is clearly depicted that the Indian socio-cultural discourse about the purpose behind the education of offspring is still highly contradictory and confusing. It is seen in the ambivalent messages regarding education that mothers like Gouri (*Sister of My Heart*), Saroja (*Tamarind Mem*) and Sita (*The Thousand Faces of Night*) pass on to their offspring. Education of sons is apparently a future economic investment by parents to serve their vested interests as seen in the cases of Sunil, Ramesh (*Sister of My Heart*),

and Dadda (*Tamarind Mem*). The younger female protagonists such as Aru and her sisters (*A Matter of Time*) are the rare ones able to view education from completely positive perspectives. Except for Sumi, most protagonists do not appear to possess a wholesome and rational view of education. Anju (*Sister of My Heart*) imbues it with almost mystical qualities unlike Saroja (*Tamarind Mem*) who craves it as a source of knowledge-based power. Saroja's daughters exhibit differing responses. Roopa escapes from the entire pressures of the education system to marry a man: "who adored her for her round tight body and flat mind" (Badami 72) and Kamini makes it her solitary goal to please her mother. The novels express the need for organic intellectuals in a society controlled by traditional intellectuals espousing the hegemonic cause. Analysing Gramsci's ideas, Boggs states:

His outlook was counter-hegemonic insofar as he looked to the formation of a national-popular "integrated culture" that would be transmitted through everyday social processes rather than an organized elite structure which, regardless of its "democratic" intentions, would only reproduce hierarchical power relations. (211)

Similarly, the parochial socio-cultural discourse controlling education in the novels needs challenging by what may be termed as 'organic intellectuals'. Such individuals would then be able to loosen the stranglehold of hegemony on education and then maybe education could be undertaken as a furthering of one's intellectual and mental capacities rather than as a mere economic venture serving vested interests. Otherwise, subjugation and confusion such as Kamini's to the almost demonic parental pressure regarding education might become the norm amongst the stressed out younger generation in a highly competitive world:

*I had to get away from my mother. . . Even if it meant a hundred bottles of Amruth-dhaara, dozens of eggs to make my brains work . . . I stayed awake till two-three o'clock in the morning, one ambition being to finish school and get out of the house, away from Ma. Maybe even get married . . .*

*Tamarind Mem (122)*

## Chapter Six: Marital Interactions

*'A woman's happiness lies in marriage,' she says.  
In a wedding photograph, Amma's face, now layered with  
folds of skin, is carved and delicate, the nose finely arched  
waiting for the happiness promised by the Sanskrit words  
mumbled across the marriage fire.*

*Tamarind Mem (159)*

The fictional narratives portray marriages of different generations. On the whole they are arranged marriages. The older generation is seen operating within traditional socio-cultural discourses. Emphasis is laid on the wife serving the husband and following his dictates. The most important feature of such a marriage is that the wife assimilates completely into her husband's lineage and functions within the guidelines laid down by her husband's family. The ancient Hindu concept of marriage which comes within the ideal Brahma form of marriage has been discussed in the first chapter. Elaborating traditional Hindu ideas on marriage, the social anthropologist Aileen Ross writes:

As the marriage contract was looked on as an agreement between two families rather than two young people, love was not necessary as a basis for marriage selection, nor was courtship a necessary prelude for testing the relationship. The Hindu ideal had no regard for individual taste, and in fact, rather feared it, as it might upset the adjustment of the bride to her new household. Thus marital choice was subordinate to group ends. (251)

This form of marriage is best exemplified by the relationship between Saroja's parents in *Tamarind Mem*. The marriage of this couple, referred within the novel as 'Amma' (mother) and 'Appa' (father), embodies the highly traditional face of the Hindu arranged marriage. The communication patterns between the couple appear to be totally dictated by extreme conservatism and duty-bound convention.<sup>135</sup>

Saroja's description of her natal home evokes a picture of the family's hidebound life as an extension of the parents' hidebound marriage:

A house needs a name to suit its character, the people who live inside it. The only name that suits our stern house is "Dharma"--- duty, the word by which we live. My

father goes to work every morning because it is his duty as the man of the house to earn money for his family; my mother cooks and cleans and has children because she is his wife; and it is our duty as children to obey them and respect their every word. (Badami 156)

Further observing her parents, a youthful Saroja notes:

My mother is content with the comforting boredom of our lives. She has a home that moves like clockwork and does not want any needless changes. A child is born every two years for ten years; Appa gets a promotion in his bank once every five years till he becomes a manager; Amma finishes the housework at eleven sharp and comes out to the verandah with her tin of betel leaves, chalk and *supari*<sup>136</sup> and sits there all afternoon contemplating the dusty street, . . . (156-7)

But within the older generation, there are exceptions to the rule of rigidly ordered domesticity and conventional decorum. The marital relationship between Kalyani and her husband Shripati (*A Matter of Time*) deviates from the approved conventional pattern presented by Saroja's parents. The past and existing marital tensions between Kalyani and Shripati provide a dark undertone to the novel running as a thread within the lives of her daughters and granddaughters. Aru frequently broods on her grandparents' marriage whose history simultaneously baffles and shocks her: "And when Kalyani signs her name, carefully spelling out 'Kalyanibai Pandit', Aru is amazed. 'How can she still have his name for God's sake?' "(146). The marriage of their parents indirectly casts a shadow on the marriages of the daughters, Sumi and Premi. Premi, who spares no effort to be a perfect wife and mother tells Gopal: "We're a cursed family, Gopal. I'm frightened for our children" (137). Sumi also realises the damage caused by the difficult parental interactions in their lives, and is apprehensive of the effects of her life and her mother's on the lives of her own daughters:

Kalyani's past, which she has contained within herself, careful never to let it spill out, has nevertheless entered into us, into Premi and me, it has stained our bones... And will this, what is happening to me now, become part of my daughters too? Will I burden them with my past and my mother's as well? (75)

To keep life free of bitterness, for the sake of her daughters, might account for her almost fatalistic acceptance of Gopal's desertion. The critic Lakshmi Mani states: "Sumi , . . . , accepts this betrayal stoically. She is not judgemental" (Mani 2003).<sup>137</sup>

Unlike Sumi's silent home, Saroja grows up with her mother's constantly delivered little homilies on marriage which run along familiar traditional patterns: "Get married . . . A woman without a husband is like sand without the river. No man to protect you and every evil wind will blow over your body. Listen to your mother"(Badami 158). This foregrounds the highly complex aspect of encoding and decoding the messages. Saroja subversively decodes her mother's transmission of the hegemonic discourse as an indication of her mother's inability to function as a thinking being in her own right. Instead of inculcating what the mother considers as proper values, the experience leaves Saroja with a sense of resentment and frustration. Her desire is to avoid within her own life any traces of her mother's. This feeling is vividly illustrated as the young Saroja observes her mother relaxing on the verandah after lunch:

Tiny flecks of crimson betel juice tickle out of the corner of her mouth. She wipes it delicately with the edge of her sari. All of Amma's saris have red stains at exactly the same spot on the *pallav*, even her good silk ones. With time, the stains fade from bright red to brown, and when she pats one of the saris and says, "You can have this when you are married," I have to force myself to smile and act excited. I do not want any of those saris marked by my mother's life; they disgust me. (179)

The subversive decoding that takes place also stems from resentment of the second rate status allocated to the daughters by mothers in Indian society. Aileen Ross states that for a daughter, traditionally:

Her mother was her chief supervisor and disciplinarian. ... However, she was not the mother's most important responsibility, for her duty lay first of all to her parents-in-law, then to her husband, then to her sons, and finally to her daughters. (150)

As discussed in Chapter Three, the four novelists are very clear in their depiction of this social situation and the status given to women within the cultural world of the novels. The narratives often show the attempts by mother figures to curb any attempt at self-

assertion within the younger women. The reader positing herself as cultural insider would clearly understand the familiar situation of the younger women protagonists. The submission to the patriarchal discourse comes through an initiation process of domination by a female exponent of hegemony. It is this oppressive culture that arouses a sense of repulsion in girls like Saroja (*Tamarind Mem*) and Anju (*Sister of My Heart*) rather than a direct dislike of their mothers. It is the subversion of the main discourse the audience is being asked to consider, rather than the personalised likes and dislikes of the protagonists.

The mothers within the novels attempt to turn their daughters into mirrors reflecting the idealised selves of the older women back at them. For instance, daughters such as Kalyani, (*A Matter of Time*) Kamini, Saroja, (*Tamarind Mem*) Sudha (*Sister of My Heart*) and Devi (*The Thousand Faces of Night*) have conflicting and strife-ridden relations with their respective mothers as their mothers have a sense of being cheated by the offspring in a psychological sense. This is most vividly illustrated in the relationship between Kalyani and her mother Manorama:

The truth is that Kalyani, her mother's despair, the girl who had seemed such a weak, feeble creature, was the one who defeated her mother after all. Manorama had taken charge of her own and her husband's life, she had given it a shape that was to dazzle everyone. She herself took an enormous pride in her husband's position and her own public activities, . . .

But Kalyani destroyed all this. When she returned home, a deserted wife, and, as Manorama saw it, a disgrace to the family, Manorama gave up everything, she never took part in any public activities again. (Deshpande 154)

Married daughters returning home is disgraceful in the conservative Indian socio-cultural context. This is because: "the mother's prestige as well as that of the whole family depended on the way the daughter reacted to the work and discipline of her new home"(Ross 150). But Deshpande cleverly twists such a feature of the traditional discourse into an opportunity for the women to start a new life outside of marital pressures. In spite of Deshpande's assertion that she does not write to educate the world (Holm 1997), she seems to be creating a truly liberated and powerful woman in Sumi, as



a non-aggressive non-conformist to the dominant ideology. Her rebelling is so subtle, it can mislead the upholders of the hegemonic systems. The reader sees Sumi, after Gopal's desertion, develop the hidden aspects to her talents: "the separation, though unsought by Sumi, enables her to blossom. She gets a job and has written a play, her first act of self-expression"(Mani 2003). Even in the play Sumi writes, she gives a subversive twist to the traditional reading of an old classic tale, much appreciated by the female students she teaches (Deshpande 158).

Like Sumi's students, the readers (especially Indian women) can interpret the novel as a piece of feminist fantasy—returning to one's place of origin, one's roots, to find one's own sense of worth. It is a message of hope for the female audience, subverting the hegemonic marital discourse. Ien Ang comments:

All too often women... have to negotiate in all sorts of situations in their lives.. . Women are constantly confronted with the cultural task of finding out what it means to be a woman, of marking out the boundaries between the feminine and the unfeminine. This task is not a simple one, especially in the case of modern societies where cultural rules and roles are no longer imposed authoritatively, but allow individualistic notions such as autonomy, personal choice, will, responsibility and rationality... . Being a woman, in other words, can now mean the adoption of many different identities, composed of a whole range of subject positions, not predetermined by immutable definitions of femininity. (1996 94)

Ang goes on to stress the importance of fantasy in the lives of women:

It is in this constellation that fantasy and fiction can play a distinctive role. They offer a private and unconstrained space in which socially impossible and unacceptable subject positions, or those which are in some way too risky to be acted out in real life, can be adopted. (ibid)

Ang accords fantasy through fiction an important place in the lives of the female audience. She claims that "fantasy and fiction, then, are the safe spaces of excess in the interstices of ordered social life where one has to keep oneself strategically under control"(ibid 95). But Deshpande's novel goes a step further as an instrument of social change. Locating itself within the contemporary Indian socio-cultural milieu, it gives a

clear indication to middle-class urban women of the possibilities outside of marriage and beyond male dominated ideologies.

But parental dominance does not always achieve its goal of filial compliance. The novels show the points of resistance at which parental authority is subverted and doctrines espoused by parents flouted. Sudha's (*Sister of My Heart*) behaviour matches most extensively the pattern expected of an obedient daughter. But that behaviour in no way signifies her acceptance of her mother's ideas. Sudha's decision to marry Ramesh reflects scant acceptance of maternal dictates. The main clinching factor behind the decision is her love for her cousin and an almost unacknowledged guilt toward him based on her knowledge of her father's leading of Anju's father to his death. Sudha feels: "It is not my *karma* I am expiating, it's my father's. My charming, thoughtless father who brought heartbreak to the Chatterjee household once"(Divakaruni 133). In the Gramscian sense, Sudha's taking upon herself the burden of her father's follies is again an expression of consensual control through the dominant discourse. Her life is dictated by the weight of her family's history. Gramsci comments: "One could even say that the more historic a nation the more numerous and burdensome are these sediments of idle and useless masses living on 'their ancestral patrimony'"(Forgacs 277). Ang further processes Gramsci's ideas:

History can also be a prison-house. It can act as an inhibiting force, from which we have to liberate ourselves. There can be too much history; the historical baggage we inherit may be too heavy, putting undue pressure on us and robbing from us the freedom to engage with our present societies in new and creative ways, to commit ourselves to contemporary change.<sup>138</sup> (2001)

Readers who consider themselves as cultural insiders, can interpret Sudha's situation within the Indian cultural ideology of children over-identifying with the lives of parents, especially the patrilineal line. But another reading of the situation is possible. Sudha's father had destroyed the Chatterjee family with his ideas, bringing about the death of Anju's father. Sudha without meaning to, similarly appears to constantly harm Anju. Sunil, Anju's betrothed falls in love with her and Sudha is aware of the situation (Divakaruni 162). When she leaves her husband, she refuses to marry her old love Ashok,

preferring instead to go to America to Anju. Anju's miscarriage also appears to have occurred because she was overworking to get the money for Sudha's America trip. Sudha experiences guilt thinking of Anju: "whose father would not be dead except for my father. Whose son would not be dead, perhaps, except for . . ." (309); but she still leaves for America knowing full well that Sunil is in love with her.

The novel can be construed as carrying a discourse containing family systems of exploitation. Sudha can be understood as really carrying the history of her patronymy within her. Her father claimed to have loved Bijoy, but ultimately lost him money as well as his life. Sudha for all her professed love of Anju can be taken as the daughter of a man who is exploitative and manipulative in the name of love. Sudha is constantly on the receiving end of Anju and Gourima's goodness. But uniformity of interpretation in readership is not a given and therefore different interpretive communities of readers will decode Divakaruni's portrayal of Sudha's relationship with Anju in different ways. Ien Ang asserts there can be no "comprehensive theory of audience" as an entity (1996 67) and a single target audience for the novels is not easy to demarcate. Nevertheless, an Indian audience will be aware of family crises involving exploitative relatives, and might prefer to read the novel with that particular perspective, thereby subverting Divakaruni's ideas about stressing friendships amongst women and bringing it to the fore in Indo-English writing.<sup>139</sup>

Sudha does not really marry to please her mother and her final resistance to maternal authority and pressure is seen in her leaving Ramesh, something expressly forbidden by her mother (Divakaruni 252). It is a bid to declare her freedom from all conventional norms. Her mother makes the young Sudha stitch a design of 'Pati Param Guru' (Husband is the ultimate teacher / master) on a bedspread (53); but at no stage does Sudha accept Ramesh as a guru. The very statement that she has pitied him (259) shows that she has never really accepted the hegemonic discourse of dominance and control. So Sudha has emerged, at least to some extent with her identity intact because in terms of Gramscian ideology, the control of hegemony over her was "an exceedingly weak hegemony, marked by a low level of integration" (Femia 49). This can be attributed to the

fact that Nalini, her mother, was a woman who though possessing the requisite emotional manipulativeness, lacked the intellectual ability to make Sudha completely assimilate the dominant ideologies she constantly expounded.

In spite of generational differences, the characters within the narratives enter into marriages carrying within themselves certain personal emotional and psychological burdens connected to their natal family ties. These often take the form of subdued anger against oppressive parental behaviour. The suffocating and repressive parent-child interaction in an arranged marriage often tends to be replaced by a similar husband wife relationship. Mahesh, (*The Thousand Faces of Night*) Devi's husband replaces her mother, Sita, as the factor controlling Devi's life as soon as the marriage takes place. The husband-wife relationship in this novel and most others, revolves around a cycle of the wife seeking permission for the activities she desires and generally being denied. Devi wants to look for a job to alleviate her boredom, but Mahesh immediately says: "What can you do?"(64). This contains echoes of Saroja as a young bride desiring to visit different places with her constantly touring husband and always being denied and told that "rules are rules"(Badami 44).

Maintaining a distinctive identity appears to be the most problematic issue for the married women within the fictional narratives. One particular method of assertion for some of the female protagonists appears to be a constant belittling of their husbands' abilities. The marital interactions in the novels exhibit a pattern of nagging and negative criticism especially by the women. Kamini recalls her mother's comments: "Ma cursed all of Dadda's sahib<sup>140</sup> ways. She told him that he should remember he was the ordinary son of an ordinary priest from a village in Udipi<sup>141</sup> and not some *angrez*<sup>142</sup> big shot"(Badami 72). Similarly Sudha imagines her sharp-tongued mother taunting her long-dead father about lack of money: " 'Are you a man or a ground-crawling insect'/ She would shout at my father: . . 'If the baby knew what kind of father he had, he too would be ashamed. He would rather die than be born to you' "(Divakaruni 31). The strong element of dislike within these relationships is an effect of a system in which duty rather than love and togetherness governs marriages. This dislike acts as a discordant

factor disturbing the smooth flow of family and children's lives and creating what Kamini terms "hidden rivers of meaning"(Badami 53) within households. Those most affected by it are the children of the marriage. The effects of such disturbed marital relationships upon the offspring are addressed in the conclusion to the thesis. The dislike which features as part of the narrative discourse is a subversion by the authors of the traditional wifely discourse of servitude. It is also a subversion of the discourse of mainstream cinema which usually emphasises the norms of patriarchy.

As discussed in Chapter Two, Indian commercial cinema is an extremely firm upholder of the traditional cultural discourse. It can even be considered to have formulated a discourse totally detrimental to the welfare of the Indian woman in general. Even recent commercial Hindi movies such as *Om Jai Jagdish* (2002) stress the importance of family above the individual couple in a marriage and the need to uphold parental ideas and authority. The viewing of such cinema may well in the long run, strengthen the consensual control exercised by the ruling groups.

Ien Ang asserts that the audience is not free of the images constantly flowing before them through a visual medium: "Audiences can never be completely free, because they are ultimately subordinated to the image flows provided by the institutions"(1991 6). Similarity between the dialogues of commercial Indian cinema and the older generation in the novels is obvious. "A woman is her husband's shadow" (Badami 214) says Saroja's mother. "A woman is a man's shadow" asserts veteran film actor Rehman in the 1967 film *Janwar*. In *Kabhi Khushi Kabhi Gum* (2001), during a discussion regarding their elder son, the mega star Amitabh Bachchan says to his wife: "I have said so and that is it." His wife always desists from arguing. Through the voice of Bachchan, an actor revered to the point of idolatry in India, the discourse of commercial Hindu cinema repeatedly reaffirms the secondary status awarded to women and the marital relationship itself in India and continually emphasises the vital status of the extended family in the lives of all married couples. With regard to a wife's role within Indian society, Aileen Ross asserts that "her personal qualities in relation to her husband's personality were not

as important as her ability to fit into his family in which she played a very subordinate part”(153).

The marital discourse within the novels moves within varying aspects of the dominant ideology. The four authors have provided insights into many aspects of arranged marriage as an institution. The most positive aspect of the Indian marital discourse within the hegemonic principles is seen in the cheerful and satisfying relationship between Sumi’s aunt, Goda-mavshi and her husband Satya-kaka (*A Matter of Time*). In this relationship some deviation from the traditional norms of male authority is apparent. On Satya’s part the constant assertion of his male authority is absent. Their relationship is based on affection and friendship. Telling Goda’s story, Deshpande writes: “Her luck held in marriage too, for Satyanarayan was, still is, an easy-tempered man, a good provider and cheerful companion, laying his jokes at Goda’s feet like a homage, and even today, after forty years of marriage, devoted to his wife” (102). Through Goda and her husband Deshpande portrays the most positive aspect of the arranged marriage system which is created because of individual ability and temperament.

When taken as a paradigm of the arranged marriage amongst the older generation, Saroja’s (*Tamarind Mem*) parents’ relationship clearly shows the authoritarian stance adopted by Saroja’s father lending a rather sombre and staid overtone to the marriage. Saroja observes: “Amma. . . does not trust herself to make any decisions without getting my father’s “Uh-hunh” of approval” (Badami 180). But while this marriage may seem sterile, it does not appear to contain dark undercurrents of stress and acute unhappiness unlike Saroja’s own marital relationship. The most negative aspect of the arranged marriage system, however, is seen in the tortured relationship between Kalyani and Shripati (*A Matter of Time*). The only mitigation of its darkness is Shripati’s gifting back of Kalyani’s parental home, the righting of a wrong perpetrated by her mother, who left the house to Shripati. But the wording of his will, where he refers to her as “Kalyani, daughter of Vitthalrao and Manoramabai” (245) also appears to totally negate her status as his wife for while giving her back her natal home, he also appears to be stripping her off her wifely status. Yet the message given by Shripati is decoded by Kalyani as a

restoration of her lost status as daughter of the house (ibid). There appears to be an element of fantasy in Kalyani's processing of Shripati's message, another small miracle created by her in a bid to survive the harsh world. The writer herself feels that "the real miracle is Kalyani herself, Kalyani who has survived intact, in spite of what Shripati did to her, Kalyani who has survived Manorama's myriad acts of cruelty" (151). So Kalyani seems to emotionally survive after Shripati's death by clinging to the idea that Shripati further enhances her status by gifting back her home.

But as pointed out earlier, Ang's argument that the audience is itself an uncertain factor is also relevant here. The reader is left open to decipher Kalyani's decoding of the message. Subversion of patriarchy can be seen in Kalyani's accepting the house as it was always hers. It may be that she considers that she has merely got back her own by simply outlasting Shripati. In her understanding of his message, she has defeated him by subverting it to suit her ideas.

The British cultural geographer, Linda McDowell discusses a paper published by the scholar Deniz Kandiyoti in 1988, on non-European societies. McDowell states that Kandiyoti

drew attention to different family structures and the way in which wives and widows were dependent on particular structures of patriarchal kinship relations, arguing that it was in women's self-interest to support a system that was essential for their long-term survival and living standards even while it was also oppressing them and their daughters.

In her work, Kandiyoti insisted on the recognition of women's agency; women in the two broad forms of patriarchy, may be subordinate but they are not necessarily subservient. They are able to work within and to some extent subvert patriarchal relations, . . . (20)

Such a method of women's survival can be visualised as an extension of the Gramscian theory of "interclass alignment in the attainment of hegemony" (Landy 32). Gramsci had recognised the presence of "different interest groups" (ibid) where the importance of division of power between dominant and subaltern groups kept the social structure in

place. The ambiguity within the novels is a reflection of the cultural ambiguity within the society. For instance, strong women like Manorama who possess the strength to challenge the hegemonic discourse and are fortunate enough to have family support also submit to forces of tradition and let her own fears destroy the base of her strength. She has only a daughter, no sons and though her husband Vithalrao is a modern and loving man, “Manorama who had been terrified that her husband would marry again never got over this fear”(Deshpande 128).

However, the meta-narrative of the fiction can often be read as continuous, but underplayed female resistance to the hegemonic discourse and then an abrupt but ironical shift toward connivance with the dominant ideology in order to resist all effort toward autonomy and attainment of personhood by the offspring, whether male or female.

In discussing women as agents of repression towards their own sex, Atrey and Kirpal, conclude that “in the Indian patriarchal family, there exists an independent community of women which evolves as a result of the social norms and strictures, which discourage interaction between the sexes beyond certain limits”(70). A study of the marriages within the novels supports this critical perspective. The older women in the family very often attempt to manipulate the lives of the younger ones in such a manner that spousal interactions are limited to the minimum. This view is further supported by Roy’s anthropological study of Bengali extended families.<sup>143</sup> Divakaruni’s Mrs Sanyal appears as a perfect illustration of this aspect of traditional Indian family systems. This controlling and separation-oriented discourse seems to be fostered in order to leave undisturbed the primary gender order in the younger women’s lives. Indian women spend a large section of their lives being dominated and subdued by older persons of their own sex. The much debated male dominance is often a surface control system. Veena Das states that “there is considerable tension between the ties created by sexuality and those created by procreation, and a man is often torn between loyalty to his mother and his wife” (1993 208).



The narratives focus on the mother-child relationship as an ever dominant factor exercising tremendous influence upon the marital relationships of the offspring. The mothers in the novels are mostly women who do not have many activities to occupy them, physically and intellectually. Sumi (*A Matter of Time*) and Gourima (*Sister of My Heart*) are different in this respect. Upon losing their husbands, they focus inwards for emotional and intellectual support rather than use their offspring as emotional crutches. Their attitudes challenge and subvert the typical Indian discourse which accords status to a woman only when she is a mother: "Having a child, no matter at what age, changes the status of a woman in all classes of Indian society . . . No woman is more unfortunate than the one who is unable to bear a child"(Roy 125). The cultural hegemony prevalent in upper-middle class Indian society finds it easier to locate women within a stereotyped groove as 'mother and mother only'. The fictional narratives illustrate these attempts of the dominant discourse to place women within the same groove, yet they simultaneously portray the women's resistance to attempts to bind them within traditional ideological dictates. Roy's statement leads to greater understanding of the various inadequacies present in the lives of the upper middle class Hindu women within the novels and also clarifies their frequent need to over-identify with their offspring.

A strong contrast is observed in the character of Saroja (*Tamarind Mem*). Saroja initially appears as woman whose life seems to overlap with her daughters. But in her later years, she moves her life on another track altogether. She emotionally distances herself from her children (who tend to cling) and begins an ironic introspection of her memories of the past and all relationships. Seen in the older Saroja is an unusual facet of an elderly female character within the cultural discourse of the novels. She is clearly sarcastic, but towards the latter half of the novel the sarcasm is tinged with humour. The following dialogue between Saroja and Kamini illustrates the change in Saroja's previously anger-driven persona.

Are you still going for a walk at the crack of dawn,. . .

Yes.

All alone?

No, arm in arm with the chief minister and his *bibiji*<sup>144</sup>. . . (259)

To a culturally familiar reader, the voice of Saroja is that of an upper middle class educated elderly woman who views her past with ironic detachment and has not lost all sense of self in the process of being a mother. With age and widowhood, Saroja has moved beyond the need for conformism within the hegemonic discourse. Her years provide her a safety cloak of eccentricity. Gramsci discussing conformism argues: “Everyone is led to make of himself the archetype of ‘fashion’ and ‘sociality’, to offer himself as the ‘model’. Therefore, sociality or conformism is the result of a cultural (but not only cultural) struggle; it is an ‘objective’ or universal fact, . . .” (Forgacs 400). Gramsci goes on to comment on : “a false conformism or sociality, that is a tendency to settle down into customary or received ideas” (ibid). It is this manner of false conformism that Saroja has avoided with age. The dominant ideology would label her behaviour eccentric and indulge it on the basis of age. Saroja subverts the ideology, using her age and leading her life autonomously. She further rejects the cultural hegemony by encouraging her daughters to ultimately move out of her maternal shadow and create independent existences; prioritising their individualism and not the family. Saroja muses:

But these are *my* memories, I want to remind Kamini. Why should you worry about them? Why do you allow my history to affect yours? ... Yesyes, our stories touch and twine, but they are threads of different hues. Mine is almost at an end, but yours is still unwinding. Go, you silly girl, build your own memories.

(Badami 263)

Readers aware of Hindu cultural norms, can view Saroja as epitomising, in her later life and actions, the Hindu ideal of *Vanaprastha*<sup>145</sup> (see Chapters One and Three). The literary critic, Robbie Clipper Sethi, in her review of Badami’s book, touches on this issue: “As a widow, . . . , Saroja takes to the railroad, a middle-class, modern-day *sanyasi*,<sup>146</sup> seeing places her husband would not take her on his frequent business trips.”<sup>147</sup> It is yet again a tale told containing elements of wish-fulfilment for the readers; highly desirable solutions involving the ideal theory of *Vanaprastha* in the contemporary angst-ridden world. A target audience with a high level of awareness with regard to Indian cultural traditions would read such situations more easily; but they would not necessarily be inaccessible to the reader. Discussing fantasy and fiction Ang clarifies:

Fictions, . . . , are collective and public fantasies; they are textual elaborations, in narrative

form, of fantastic scenarios which, being mass-produced, are offered to us in fiction. This explains, of course, why we are not attracted to all fictions available to us: most of them are irrelevant to our personal concerns and therefore not appealing. Despite this, the pleasure of consuming fictions that do attract us may still relate to that of fantasy; that is, it still involves the imaginary occupation of other subject positions which are outside the scope of our everyday social and cultural identities. (1996 93)

Conjoined to the concept of the ‘over-investing’ mother is also the idea of the dissatisfied wife, frustrated within the marital culture. Speaking of the husband, Roy stresses the aggravation produced in marital relations by “the social custom of having no opportunity to build a close, warm relationship with his wife, . . . ”(120). Roy adds that the husband projects a withdrawn and indifferent image to his wife.<sup>148</sup> “ From the wife’s point of view, this may often be interpreted as being the self-centredness of a husband who does not demonstrate love and affection for his wife”(121). Roy’s anthropological work is based on her study of Bengali upper class joint families in the 1960s and 70s. But the pattern of marital interactions she sketches between most husbands and wives does conform to the traditional cultural systems and is reproduced within the fiction. It is most vividly observed in the relationship between Saroja and her husband (*Tamarind Mem*) Moorthy, Saroja’s husband, is portrayed almost stereotypically, as the epitome of the Indian man trapped within the dictates of the conservative Indian cultural doctrines prescribed for husbandly behaviour.

Gramsci’s analyses conclude that “sexual instincts are those that have undergone the greatest degree of repression from society in the course of its development”(Forgacs 290). The pattern of the dominant gender order of upper middle class Indian society tends to support this. Sexual relations between the spouses is a matter of silence punctuated by the sounds of “the rhythmic creak-creak of the wooden slats”(Badami 217). The middle class Indian men in the novels seem to mould their sexual lives on the lines of Gramsci’s worker, who in turn like the peasant, returns home after a hard day’s work to take his own wife to bed. “Womanizing demands too much leisure”(Forgacs 292) which the peasant and worker cannot afford. Similarly, the white collar Indian man in the novels rarely has time for love-making. Gramsci goes on to say that it is not ‘mechanized’ sexual

union, but the “growth of a new form of sexual union shorn of the bright and dazzling colour of the romantic tinsel typical of the petty bourgeois and the Bohemian layabout”(ibid). Laying aside notions of bourgeois behaviour and Bohemianism, this shearing of all romantic trappings of the sex act is what ultimately stultifies the physical act for most of the couples operating within the hegemonic order. Anju and Sunil (*Sister of My Heart*) appear as exceptions to the rule, enjoying physical intimacy openly. Anju describes her lovemaking with Sunil:

He is kissing my eyelids now, his breath hot on my face. I open my mouth to him, shrug off my clothes and pull at his. My bones are remoulding themselves to fit against his, our skins have melted together, seamless, to form a map of desire. We move in urgent harmony, cry out in unison, lie damp and triumphant in each other's arms. (176)

The novels illustrate the constant presence of hegemony within the marital interactions; there often appears to be a husband-wife complicity in nurturing the discourse, attributing priority to matters of extended family rather than fostering their relationship as a couple. For instance, neither Dadda nor Saroja (*Tamarind Mem*) makes any real attempt to create a strong husband-wife bond; they are on the contrary constantly under pressure from the dominant ideology which turns man and wife into opposing camps of ‘your family’ and ‘my family’, claiming ascendancy over tending to the marital relationship itself. Their complicity appears unknowing, but neither makes any concerted effort to dispense with the hegemonic sway. Badami's rendering of this conflict-ridden marital tale can be interpreted as a warning against the patriarchal discourse, by a culturally knowledgeable community of readers. But as audiences vary, younger readers might dismiss it as problems of a different generation, who possessed a lesser degree of autonomy.

The female characters from most generations within the novel act as points of resistance to the prevalent discourse. In some way or the other, through active or passive resistance they manage to subvert and often flout to some extent the hold of the patriarchal norms. Gourima runs the family bookshop (*Sister of My Heart*) breaking the Chatterjee family dictates of male financial control. Sita manipulates Mahadevan to run his professional life along lines planned by her (*The Thousand Faces of Night*). The younger female

characters such as Sudha (*Sister of My Heart*) resist the hegemonic discourse and carve out their own lives supported by women such as Abha Pishi and Gourima who themselves have been victims of the repressive doctrines of patriarchy. The authors are clearly presenting the concept of a community of women supporting and guarding each other. Such a reading of the novels is likely by certain groups of readers; but the interpretation would also depend on the level of hegemony present within the personal lives of the readers themselves. The audience is not located within a vacuum because they bring a substantial amount of their own selves into their fictional interpretations. Ien Ang's discussion on television audiences clarifies further:

This does not mean that people's involvement with media as audience members in everyday situations is not real or non-existent; it only means that our representations of those involvements and their inter-relationships in terms of 'uses', 'gratifications', 'decodings', 'readings', 'effects', 'negotiations', 'interpretive communities' or 'symbolic resistance'... should be seen as ever so many discursive devices to confer a kind of order and coherence onto the otherwise chaotic outlook of the empirical landscape of dispersed and heterogeneous audience practices and experiences.

(1996 77)

The four women novelists under discussion share certain similarities in their representation of religious and cultural discourses. These similarities can be seen in their conception of the strong female characters they have created, who mostly have stronger personalities than the men. For instance Sita dominates Mahadevan (*The Thousand Faces of Night*), Rayaru submits to Putti Ajji's monetary manipulation (*Tamarind Mem*), Gouri is more practical than Bijoy (*Sister of My Heart*), while Sumi proves far stronger emotionally than Gopal (*A Matter of Time*). The women endure and survive, unlike men who are either aggressive or retiring. They have created a community of women willing to act often as compatriots and guardians of their own sex. Divakaruni explains the intention motivating her book: "This book explores the place of women in the world—their challenges and boundaries—it honors the bonds women have—which outlast time and geography."<sup>149</sup>

Most of these women are mothers and resist the injustices of the hegemonic discourse from a gendered as well as a maternal perspective. Indian feminism incorporates the principle of *Shakti* or female energy as well as the image of the mother-goddess as a vital component of the women's movement. Irene Gedalof states that the Indian scholar, Kamala Ganesh<sup>150</sup>: "... looks at a wide variety of powerful mother-goddesses in Hindu scriptures and iconography, and argues that at least some of these goddesses are never fully domesticated or constrained by male gods"(39).

The intrinsic ability of the women to survive and then resist appears to be the most disturbing factor for the men within the narratives. For instance Sudha's ability to stand by her daughter and resist all forms of hegemonic pressure disturbs Ashok (*Sister of My Heart*). Similarly Saroja's sharp tongue and refusal to follow dictates of wifely humility is discomfiting to Dadda (*Tamarind Mem*). The men either retreat or move away. It is as if the Indian male as seen within the fiction is willing to accept only the nurturing side of the woman, not the strength, which he appears to consider a darker aspect to a woman's personality. The ubiquitous mythical undertone running through all the narratives reflects again the vital role of the mother-goddess in Hindu life. The goddess or Devi as she is termed, always presents two opposing faces. She is the gentle nurturing mother Durga able to defend her young if need be; but she is also Kali, the Dark one<sup>151</sup>, feared by every demon in the cosmos and terrifying in her anger to all men and women.

Divakaruni, herself a Bengali Brahmin, weaves through her tale the pattern of the Indian male's search for the nurturing woman's persona. Sunil's attraction to Sudha and antagonism to Anju can be read as the male response to the personae of Kali and Durga. Sudha, with her fairness, beauty and patience could be said to personify Durga and the darker, articulate and vehement personality of Anju symbolises Kali. Anju discomfits her own husband which creates marital discord between them, as she challenges and does not merely nurture. During the autumn and early winter in Bengal, from mid-September to mid November, the festivals worshipping Durga and Kali take place. The idols are there all over the cities, towns and villages. Durga is always crafted as a serenely beautiful, gorgeously arrayed woman with a gentle expression on her face, surrounded by the idols

of her four children, Ganesh, Kartik, Laxmi and Saraswati. Kali is dark and fierce, tongue blood red, hand holding a sharp sickle and the dismembered head of a demon. She also wears a necklace of skulls and her hair in black waves hangs below her knees. She strikes fear. She is pictured standing, weapons aloft, one foot on the prostrate body of her husband, Shiva, who lies on the ground to restrain her destructive anger. Legend has it that demonic injustices drove Kali to destroy the evil ones and then her anger spun out of control driving her to further destruction till the cosmos stood in danger of being obliterated.. She could only be restrained by the love of her husband.

Often the cultural discourse of patriarchy in India refuses to accept the forceful personality of Kali as a positive aspect of the female character. Worship of Kali is associated with *Tantrik Hinduism*<sup>152</sup> and its dark esoteric rites. Another form of Kali is the powerful and demonic Bhavani, the goddess of the dacoits and thuggees (Indian highway robbers of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries) or stranglers and her anger is supposed to destroy if she is offended by a devotee. She is considered more as destroyer than creator. But the patriarchal tradition which accepts Durga from a biased and incomplete perspective ironically overlooks the fact that the loving and patient figure of Durga is always sculpted mounted on a lion with weapons in her ten arms and slaying a demon with a trident.

As mother and nurturer, Durga always evokes a positive response in the Indian male psyche. Saroja's mother is always the nurturer to the males of the family, providing domestic comforts and not questioning the dominant discourse. Saroja recalls: "My mother refused to fight for anything. ...She framed her conditions for contentment and found them within marriage"(Badami 216). She is a contrast to the fury of Putti Ajji, who emerges triumphant in her battle to subdue the patriarchal oppression. Putti Ajji's strength and challenge to her unfaithful husband Rayaru, is according to Saroja's mother a mistake, as the latter is completely immersed in the hegemonic code of conduct. She tells Saroja: "What is the use of having a palace of a house, boxes full of jewellery, when your man is busy admiring another woman's charms? . . . Nobody blamed Rayaru, you know, the fault was entirely Putti's"(Badami 215). The culturally aware reader will

comprehend that as the goddess Kali's non-conformity to the traditional discourse of womanly humility is misread as brazenness, similarly women like Putti who are unashamed to exhibit their strength are also shunned by those moving within dominant social norms. These women with power also function as the 'in-between-zone' characters as they are wives, but do not follow traditional rules of wifehood. In that sense they awaken a sense of affinity even within culturally alien readers who identify with their inner strengths. Saroja, herself a non-conformist, respects Putti Ajji: "At least my grandmother fought for all that she could get from that hollow marriage"(ibid). "In a painful stroke of irony it is by calling Putti Ajji "the only person who has any guts" in the family that Saroja offends her grandfather's dignity and condemns herself to the marriage that prevents her from becoming a doctor"(Clipper Sethi). But in her own marriage, Saroja remains the challenger; she is no passive receptacle for the male-dominated ideologies. Referring to the work of the postcolonial Indian scholar, Tanika Sarkar,<sup>153</sup> Gedalof writes:

Sarkar notes a never fully resolved tension between evocations of those aspects of militancy and sexuality in the mother-goddess as icon of anti-colonial struggle, and the desire to contain this militancy within the safer frame of the innocent, nurturing and healing mother-figure who passes power back to her sons. (41)

As mentioned earlier, the pattern of relationships with parents in the novels, has a strong impact on a couple's marital interactions. The father-daughter relationship is very often portrayed as a vital one linked to the daughter's later life. Commenting on the warmth of the father-daughter bond in Bengali families, Manisha Roy writes:

The relationship from the beginning, is charged with the imminent pain of separation that every father must go through. This knowledge on the part of both the father and the daughter seems to make the naturally close relationship even more intense. Second, that the women in the house are continuously trying to interfere with this close bond indirectly reinforces it. A very deep bond develops between them, as it were, and against the women's world. During the daughter's early age, it remains a close bond of affection; later it becomes one of companionship and friendship. (22)



The novels touch on this aspect of Indian family interactions in the portrayals of close bonds between Dadda and his daughters, (*A Matter of Time*) Mahadevan and his daughter, Devi (*The Thousand Faces of Night*) and the ties between Sudha (*Sister of My Heart*) and their family chauffeur Singhji, who she later learns is her father. The women in the narratives further substantiate Roy's ideas as the authors depict the younger women struggling within the stifling nature of the hegemonic discourse to build close bonds with husbands which would provide solace for the loss of the paternal warmth. Unfortunately most do not succeed. Only Sumi (*A Matter of Time*) who has never been the recipient of demonstrative paternal affection builds a relationship of real warmth and friendship with Gopal. Gopal in turn is able to give great love to his daughters. He later remembers his daughters as babies: "holding the small warm bundles in my arms, I was filled with an emotion I had never known until then"(68). The reader could interpret that the other marriages do not succeed because the woman protagonists are participants in a father-daughter relationship where the father actually fails as protector. Even somebody as modern and liberal as Vithalrao is unable to protect his daughter Kalyani from the machinations of his wife Manorama. Sumi could build a strong marriage because she had no such male figure whose love had initially nurtured and then failed her. Gopal was the first man to demonstrate such love and Deshpande also portrays Sumi as an inherently strong human being.

Prior to Gopal's leaving, Sumi, Gopal and their daughters epitomise a functional upper middle-class Indian family in a positive sense. Deshpande's portrayal is counter-hegemonic to the conflict-ridden families in the other novels, where fathers construct alliances with daughters against the mothers, creating constant domestic disharmony. Saroja reveals: "I feel a twinge of jealousy when I see the way he is with his daughters. He shows an interest in everything they do, an affection he never shows me" (Badami 225). According to Sita "both Devi and Mahadevan had grown into the sly, shifty-eyed accomplices of a mutiny that threatened to erupt through books, daydreams, gods and goddesses . . ." (Hariharan 105).

In the common Indian situation of conflict originating from extended families of parents, for a younger more modern Indian reader the friendship between Gopal and Sumi could be read as an ideal role model for marriage for the younger generation. The relationship is egalitarian in all senses, a marriage of friendship because even after the separation Gopal feels he can only share his innermost feelings with Sumi: "Marriage is not for everyone. The demand it makes—a lifetime of commitment—is not possible for all of us. No, I can say these things only to Sumi. And I am still waiting for her to come to me." (Deshpande 69) Their daughters prove the rationale behind such a relaxed upbringing by such parents as they do not disintegrate as individuals after the parental split, but are able to pick up the threads of their own lives. But the disintegration of the family unit itself could be then taken by the reader to mean that such a situation is too good to last. It ultimately belonged to the realm of fantasy. The author appears to be re-subverting her initial subversion of the dominant discourse.

Gopal speaks of his daughters with immense love and then deserts them in their vulnerable teenage years (Aru is not yet eighteen). The underlying nuance of such a situation could be a subtle warning to the community of women to place greater trust in the female lineage rather than the patrilineal heritage. It is the former who protect. Paternal love appears to contain an elusive quality. Such a reading would be a direct countering of the Indian cinematic discourse, whereby the importance of patronymy is continually stressed and the father is portrayed as the epitome of reliability. Film titles such as *Babul ka Ghar* (Father's House) identify the safety and comfort of the natal home with the presence of the father, while no mention is usually made of the mother.

The father-daughter relations exercise a certain influence in marital interactions as is apparent in Devi's (*The Thousand Faces of Night*) constantly seeking her father-in-law's company for solace in her married loneliness. She thinks of him as a "dignified patriarch; a gentle pharaoh in retirement"(51). But the father-son bonds within the novels are fraught with tension. In Gopal's (*A Matter of Time*) case, the anger at his father's loss turns into anger at the father himself, together with questions on his parents' marriage.<sup>154</sup> The darkest aspect of the father-son interaction is seen in the relations between Sunil

(*Sister of My Heart*) and his father. Sunil seeks to free his very self from the father. His inability to offer all of himself to his wife stems from the constant strife and hurt experienced from early life in his interactions with his father. His personality appears to have turned in upon itself to such a measure that his self-sufficiency approaches callousness toward Anju. It has, in many ways also transformed him into a cultural outsider unable to relate fully to a woman steeped in the culture of her community and social group. So Anju's constant and typical questions as to his whereabouts pull from him the retort that he has to live his own life too (199).

The fictional narratives show a similar pattern in the desire of the children to accord a very important and specific position to the father within their lives. Thus, Sudha (Divakaruni 22) wants to know the story of her lost father, Kamini (Badami 71) feels pride as her paternal aunt talks of her father's lineage, and Gopal (*A Matter of Time*) and Sunil (*Sister of My Heart*) resent the physical and emotional absences of their fathers and Devi (*The Thousand Faces of Night*) seeks to replace her dead father with a similarly gentle father-in-law, while Anju (*Sister of My Heart*) and Aru (*A Matter of Time*) both experience anger toward fathers whom they consider traitors to paternal duties; since one has died in search of adventure and the other has deserted his family to seek answers within himself. The role of the father cannot be under-emphasised in a patriarchal society such as India, where all heritage stems through the paternal line. The ancient socio-cultural discourses have always stressed the position of father as akin to the Almighty. Discussing the work of the theorist Kumkum Roy,<sup>155</sup> Irene Gedalof points out that: "Kumkum Roy notes that spiritual birth, defined as masculine, often takes precedence over physical birth, as in those initiation ceremonies where upper-caste Hindu boys are 'reborn' from their spiritual priest-teachers"(39).

But a more critical or 'resistant' reading of the fictional narratives illustrates instances of betrayal on the part of the fathers leading to situations where the children's sense of their genealogy and their anchoring in society appears to be threatened. The consequences of such betrayals vary. Sudha (*Sister of My Heart*) attempts to expiate her absent father's sins by entering into an unsuitable arranged marriage; Anju adopts an aggressive stance towards life and society in general; Sunil's insecurity based on paternal pressures creates

further marital conflict for him and Anju. Gopal's (*A Matter of Time*) questioning of his patrilineal burdens leads him to dispense with the life of a householder, thereby abandoning wife and children, whereas Devi (*The Thousand Faces of Night*) seeks a replacement for her father in other male figures. Kamini (*Tamarind Mem*) too feels cheated with her father's death and forsakes marriage altogether. Younger characters such as Aru lose faith in father figures *vis-a-vis* the warmth and security offered by maternity. The audience may read these texts as stating that hegemony dies if not nurtured by females. The illusion of dominant discourse flourishes because the women keep it alive; it almost reads as an indulgence of maternal beings toward less able males. Another fantasy element may enter the picture for feminist readers who may interpret the novels as advocating the basic redundancy of patriliney. There appear to be few male reviewers of these novels. C.E. Poverman's, one of the few male reviewers sounds quite patronising in his interpretations of Divakaruni's *Arranged Marriage*. Discussing Divakaruni's heroines, Poverman writes:

She is a woman who has fled the East in search of release. It is release from male-dominated India. It is release from those values transmitted through mothers and aunts: duty, submission in all things---an arranged marriage, her husband's will, the indignity of sex; ...It is an oppressive world. The West has glamour; it offers the opportunity to be your own person, .... And yet, thousands of miles from India, much as they wish to embrace these values, the characters find that the warnings of their mothers and aunts were often right. Or even when they know they're wrong, it's still not easy to let go. (2002 2)

Such male reviewers illustrate Ang's theory that "In addition to an image of oneself, however, an ideology also offers an image of others. Not only does one's own identity take on form in this way, but the ideology also serves to outline the identity of other people"(1985 102).

Within the apparent hegemonic discourse of the novels, deviations occur. The fluctuating patterns of contemporary Indian society are seen in the reduced levels of tolerance and acceptance of the hegemonic discourse in the attitudes of the younger generation. They are not always willing to accept their subordinate status within the social and familial situations, a factor, which is vital especially with regard to the women in the novels. Aru

is clear that her mother, Sumi, should take legal recourse and not stoically accept Gopal's desertion: " 'You're making it too easy for him,' she tells Sumi"(Deshpande 61). Aru is a modern Indian girl and clear in her distaste for traditional doctrines of hegemonic acceptance.

The differences in rearing a male child and a female child have been explored in Chapters Three and Five. The contemporary Indian girl tends to be less accepting of the lack of identity accorded her. The novels portray most of the younger women as refusing to exist merely as clones of the maternal figures. Customarily, Indian women are unwilling to grant recognition to their child as a distinctive individual as the child often represents the sole factor supporting the mother's sense of self-worth. Roy explains this cultural discourse: "Becoming a mother, in fact is not so much a change of status as it is the attainment of a status a woman is born to achieve"(125). The detrimental effects of this discourse are clearly illustrated in the relationship between Sita and Devi. Devi appears almost mindless in her obedience. Referring to her relationship with her mother, Devi says: "I was like putty in her hands"(Hariharan 14). Enormous tension is generated when the children attempt to do away with such hegemonic family systems.

In contemporary Indian fiction dealing with upper-middle class urban segments, such opposition to hegemony, especially on the part of the daughters, leads to disturbances and problems but not total ostracism. This lack of total ostracism may be construed by the younger female reader as permissibility of rebellion within a hegemonic social structure. Also within the narratives appears an underlying theme that parents are by no means infallible; a doctrine contrary to traditional Indian theories. For instance, "in Vedic literature, the mother was compared to light"(Ross 142). The novels illustrate that complete obedience to parental dictates does not always lead to perfect happiness.

Linked to the repression of the younger generation is the fact that marriages are constantly dominated by patterns of interactions with parents of both spouses. As the young woman, Manju tells Sumi: "Old people feel they can say what they want, they can hurt your feelings, it doesn't matter"(Deshpande 161). The importance of family as

extended family has been explored in Chapter Three. The reader who identifies as a cultural insider would easily grasp the dilemma experienced by Anju and her conflicting emotions as she makes extensive phone calls to India in the face of Sunil's disapproval of the expense. Her dissatisfaction after those calls have ended would also be easily decoded by the reader with cultural awareness. Anju says:

The phone call home is a major disappointment. I should have known it's always like this.. For sure this time I think, we'll communicate. . . After we've spoken our I-love-yous and hundred-blessings-to-you-boths and hung up, I wonder in frustration if we were even speaking the same language. (Divakaruni 212-13)

The peculiar situation of male interactions with family is also decipherable by the same audience, who would be culturally able to locate Ramesh's subjugation to his mother's will within the same context. Mothers seeking to consolidate their identity through their male progeny is an ongoing feature of Indian socio-cultural discourse. Roy observes women as mothers of sons and the Indian (especially Bengali) mother-son relationship, which furthers an understanding of the socio-cultural discourse within which the characters in the narratives function:

Though the decline of the son's need for motherly love is imminent, the mother does not know how to tolerate this. Or rather she does not allow herself to see the reality. In this society, a mother is not made to realize this. She knows that her greatest achievement as a woman is in having a son and all the social customs and beliefs reinforce the fact that this is the source of ultimate happiness and value. She is never told that she will have to part with this happiness sooner or later . . . Despite all facts of life to the contrary, in this culture neither the mother nor the son ever believes in this separation. She knows that . . . eventually he must marry another woman. The son, . . . knows... that he should prepare to give himself and be close to another woman---his wife. But he does not have the courage to give up the security of his mother's love, . . . Consequently his romantic relationship with his wife never takes on a real form, . . . (133)

With regard to the recurring image of woman as mother, Gedalof argues that "discussions of the place of the mother-figure in Hinduism suggest that there can be a variety of metaphysical models in which the specifically female is managed in identity-constituting processes that continue to privilege men"(38). Commercial cinema also bolsters this

discourse constantly stressing the mother-son bond. The narratives explore how the identity of the mother is constituted culturally by herself. Mrs. Sanyal (*Sister of My Heart*) has sacrificed many things for her sons and when she considers it time she decides to collect her dues by subjugating Ramesh enough to make him divorce Sudha. In this culturally constituted maternal self, there is no place for the completely selfless mother who has merely nurtured without seeking future compensation. Surprisingly enough, Divakaruni's meekest female creation Sunil's mother, portrays shades of the completely unselfish and nurturing mother satisfied merely with her son's personal happiness. Anju appreciatively notes this:

She is truly good-hearted and very fond of Sunil. I know she would have liked to spend more time with him . . . but she never complains when Sunil goes off with me for the whole day. She will happily make us a cup of tea and tell me stories about Sunil's childhood . . . At such times she looks beautiful. (170)

Within the dominant discourse, the argument moves from the relevant status accorded to the mother to the relegation of the marital relationship, especially in its romantic form, to a highly subordinate status within the family and social structure. Any reform in thinking is strongly resisted within the dominant gender order. In the name of tradition and cultural norms, a consensual control is obtained by older generations, who may loosely approximate to what Gramsci termed "traditional intellectuals"(Fontana 29), over the younger generation who may be taken to fall into the category of the "masses". In India, with many cultures deferring to historicity, such control in the name of age and antiquity reflects Gramsci's reference to "the popular beliefs, the traditions, the customs, and the past usages that together form the "common sense" of the masses and that tend to preserve the supremacy of the ruling groups . . . " (ibid). Stressing tradition helps the ruling group to maintain a strong form of consensual control.

Conventional norms of behaviour pattern Indian family life. Yet within conventional dictates run subversive teachings and nuances of inner rebellion, inculcated amongst women by women. Such messages are intricately encoded and can be decoded only through by a cultural insider possessing deeper awareness. Veena Das comments that

“parents, for all their advice to the daughters to consider the conjugal house as their own, would consider it unnatural if the daughters followed that advice to the letter, especially in the early years of the marriage”(1993 204). But, such messages can often be confusing for children of the marriage. Traditional discourse dictates that a young woman accord deep respect and reverence to her in-laws. But as Roy’s anthropological study shows, such feelings are mostly a veneer. A woman interviewed reveals: “I also tried all the ideal behaviour a daughter-in-law is expected to act out . . . but often I felt tired and did not see much point in anything”(123). When Saroja’s mother mockingly insists that Roopa’s dark colouring is inherited from her father’s side, she is indirectly demeaning the marital home of her daughter: “No one in our family is as black as this child. Must be from your husband’s side . . . Looks like a sweeper-caste child”(Badami 6). She is the same woman who constantly exhorts Saroja to be a good and obedient wife. These confusing messages are expressed by Saroja who in turn openly mocks her husband’s family to her children’s face (71). Children of the marriage in such a situation find themselves with a confused sense of belonging equally to two sides perpetually engaged in trivial warfare. In the novels, such situations do not have simple resolutions. The father-daughter bond discussed earlier acts as a further instrument of friction leading the children to usually ally themselves with the father. Kamini for instance, resents her mother’s slurs on her father’s family. Similarly, Devi (*The Thousand Faces of Night*) attempts to evade Sita and ally herself with her father and paternal grandmother.

Certain aspects of women’s culture, as mentioned above, are never openly discussed, instead:

In the postcolonial context, Rajeswari Sunder Rajan<sup>156</sup> points to popular cultural representations of the ‘new Indian woman,’ a construct that aims both to reconcile, in her person, the conflicts between tradition and modernity in Indian society, and to deny the actual conflicts that women experience in their lives. (129) (Gedalof 44)

Gedalof goes on to say:

As an example of this process, Sunder Rajan looks at advertisements on Indian state television that promote the ‘pan-Indian’ subject, as opposed to specific regional,



religious or communal identities. She notes that this is only achieved, ironically by 'westernizing' the Indian male consumer, whose project of 'modernization-without-westernization' is saved by the presence of 'the Indian woman, perennially and transcendently wife, mother and homemaker' whose specific role is to balance (deep) tradition and (surface) modernity. (1993 133) (ibid)

This statement explains the image of women as wives in the minds of the urban Indian men like Mahesh (*The Thousand Faces of Night*). He wants Devi to be smart and outgoing and get into activities such as his colleague's wife's painting classes (56), but not use her qualifications constructively. In a similar way Dadda (*Tamarind Mem*) expects Saroja to run his house like clockwork, be smart enough to handle his children's education and yet follow all traditional cultural systems. The urban Indian consumer of the novel will easily make the connection between the media images of the Westernized Indian woman within strongly limited boundaries. The television advertisements carry images of Indian women and marriage which are almost parallel to most cinematic images of the modern Indian woman—traditional within and Westernized on the surface.

This statement can be used to analyse the portrayal of the female image in commercial Indian cinema. The hegemonic discourse is extended, sometimes beyond rational and credible limits and distorted to support patriarchy. A Hindi film might start out depicting the heroine as smart educated woman, often holding a good job. She gradually transforms into a demure bride and daughter-in-law, eyes downcast. If she has a vivid personality, she becomes traditionally subdued with time, mouthing archaic clichés of dutiful wifely behaviour. The belief that women symbolise tradition and stability<sup>157</sup> is constantly visible. The transformative power on the audience is clearly visible. Ang's comments of television viewing apply to cinema as well: "Television consumption, in short, is a meaning-producing cultural practice at two inter-dependent levels"(1996 69). In spite of all rationalisations, the Indian cinema audience cannot easily discard the pervasive influence of the cinematic discourse constantly exercised even at home through the presence of the ubiquitous cable network, a necessity in every urban Indian home. Technology has brought the hard-core hegemonic discourse to every room within the household.

In this context, Gramsci's idea of the ruling classes formulating hegemonic discourses and obtaining consensual control is highly relevant:

One of the most important characteristics of every class which develops toward power is its struggle to assimilate and conquer 'ideologically' the traditional intellectuals. Assimilations and conquests are the more rapid and effective the more the given social class puts forward simultaneously its own organic intellectuals. (122)

The attempts at ideological conquest by the new social class in India (especially through the medium of mainstream cinema) appear to be a constant trivialising of all woman related issues and problems. The literary discourses show a similar trend, amongst producers as well as consumers. Deshpande claims : "What is wrong is that the women who write romances, mysteries, historical fiction and serious fiction are all lumped together as women writers." (Pathak 1998 87). Emphasising another aspect to the issue, Divakaruni says: "It is important to see the world as women see it because for many years, there have been only stories about men" (Vepa 2002 1).

While not adopting aggressively feminist stances, the novels by the four writers can definitely be considered subversions of the dominant literary fashions, as they write in clear tones about women's lives and resolutely create communities of women. The writers appear to be exhorting this community to stand all the more firmly by each other. The writers also have their origins in a particular socio-economic and cultural strata of society and from communities where women have for a long time have not been humiliatingly subjugated. The reader taking their biographies into account can interpret that they move their protagonists beyond stifling ideals specifically portrayed in commercial cinema.

What many would see as the degeneration of Hindi cinema from the days of Bimal Roy's *Bandini* and *Sujata* with their strong central female characters to contemporary films with their Barbie doll heroines reflects the shift in the ruling classes from the educated upper middle class to an under-educated moneyed group who have acquired wealth by illegal sources and use it further money-laundering (see Chapter Two). Their depiction of

women, romance and marital relationships in cinema strongly reflects their ideologies which are patriarchal, repressive and often demeaning toward women. The general mass acceptance of such cinema validates Gramsci's theory of spontaneous consent given by the masses to those in the ruling position. Gramsci speaks of the

“spontaneous’ consent given by the great masses of the population to the direction imprinted on social life by the fundamental ruling class, a consent which comes into existence “historically” from the “prestige” (and hence from the trust) accruing to the ruling class from its position and its function in the world of production.

(1968 124)

Gramsci's view is that such spontaneous consent has also been obtained from the masses giving them the false impression that it is their interests which the ruling groups are safeguarding: “He suggests that those who are consenting must somehow be truly convinced that the interests of the dominant group are those of society at large, that the hegemonic group stands for a proper social order in which all men are justly looked after”(Femia 42).

There seems to be a correspondence in audience views with regard to the discourse highlighted by mainstream cinema. This is proved by the continuing popularity of such cinema. There appears to have been a change in the cultural discourse of the viewing public in India. This could be attributed to the economic rise of the lesser educated classes whose present wealth is far in excess of their qualifications.<sup>158</sup>

In contemporary urban Indian society prestige accrues from money, not so much caste and education. Today, mass culture holds sway in India as opposed to elite culture which is accorded superficial respect. This mass or popular culture uses traditional discourses negatively to further its own ends and hegemony remains an ongoing process shaping the most fundamental of relationships, that is marriage. Located within this particular socio-cultural scenario, the novels can be read as an assertion of continual resistance on the part of the authors, as their unwillingness to surrender to the hegemony. With regard to romance reading, Ang stresses: “the tenacity of the desire to feel romantically”(1996 107). The same tenacious quality makes itself felt in the fictional narratives. As long as the authors attempt to speak out against the dominant ideology and consumers are willing

to show their support of this resistance by reading the novels, the novels themselves can be construed as attempts at socio-cultural reform. These novels reverse the trends of popular media and mass culture by challenging their inherent ideals, such as the ideal Indian family unit. The narratives expose the exploitativeness within family cultures in a social milieu that is constantly stressing family solidarity based on traditional norms of patriarchy.

In India today, popular culture or mass culture exerts tremendous influence especially in the form of media intrusions. Popular culture is the dominant culture in contemporary India. Stuart Hall says: “That is why Gramsci, who has a side of common sense on which cultural hegemony is made, lost and struggled over, gave the question of what he called ‘the national-popular’ such strategic importance”(1996 469).<sup>159</sup> Hall takes the discussion on popular culture even further. He asserts that “popular culture always has its base in the experiences, the pleasures, the memories, the traditions of the people”(ibid). The everyday life of ordinary people is tied in with the concept of popular culture. Popular culture, in the contemporary world scenario has emerged as a tool of the dominant culture and has therefore entered “directly into the circuits of a dominant technology—the circuits of power and capital”(ibid). Gramsci’s critique of the popular as not necessarily being in people’s best interests is very useful in processing the novels because within the narrative discourses the popular social ideals definitely do not work toward betterment of the protagonists. The popular ideals merely further vested interests. For instance, the popular ideal of the husband as the supreme teacher and protector is not applicable to Sudha (*Sister of My Heart*) whose husband Ramesh’s basic characteristic is emotional and mental weakness. Similarly, the popular cultural ideal of the nurturing mother is totally inapplicable to Mrs. Sanyal for whose sons she is more the destroyer than the nurturer.

In the Indian social scenario this has been the single most important factor influencing the lives of the urban Indian populace. What is remarkable in contemporary India is the unquestioned acceptance of obsolete traditions through the medium of popular culture. Common sense cannot always be equated with good sense. The authors studied provide disturbing insights into this aspect of Indian life and marriages. In the Gramscian sense:

The role of the 'popular' in popular culture is to fix the authenticity of popular forms, rooting them in the experiences of popular communities from which they draw their strength, allowing us to see them as expressive of a particular subordinate social life that resists its being constantly made over as low and outside. (ibid)

In the narratives, this popular culture having assumed the role of a dominant culture and its discourses, dictates notions of right and wrong including theories of common sense. Equating the word common with the word popular leads to defining common sense as that which has popular sanction regardless of individual needs or welfare. Therefore, it is common sense for Sudha (*Sister of My Heart*) not to leave an ineffective husband like Ramesh and undergo an abortion. Her mother, Nalini, is the voice of common sense; but good sense dictates that she must do everything in her power to save her unborn child. Similarly her rejection of Ashok (Divakaruni 284-6) based on his reluctance to accept her daughter is also a triumph of good sense over common sense. Ashok and her mother in the role of spokespersons for hegemony attempt to convince Sudha that it is her interest they are protecting. But Gramsci's theories of the ruling classes control is seen in the attempt to subordinate Sudha and convince her to achieve ends which satisfy the interests of her mother and Ashok who are functioning within dominant ideological structures.

The fiction can be read as resistance to the constant homilies of common sense as dictated by archaic and often repressive hegemonic systems. From the audience perspective, individual preferences would dictate the audience choice between ethics and practicality and common sense and good sense. As the protagonists are polarized, a similar polarization amongst the audience can safely be imagined. Ang's comments on the television audience are helpful in this regard:

It is often said, . . . , that the television audience is becoming increasingly fragmented, individualized, dispersed, no longer addressable as a mass or a single market, no longer comprehensible as a social entity, collectively engaged and involved in a well-defined act of viewing. (1996 67)

Similarly, readership is fragmented and the books would be read from different perspectives. Within a dominant code, more conservative readers would view Sudha negatively for loving one man and marrying another, a more liberalised lot might berate

her for submitting to hegemony. But most cultural insiders would recognise her inability to assimilate, in spite of all attempts.

In terms of cultural transition, the hostility and tensions experienced by a young bride when she first comes to live at her husband's natal home with his immediate and extended family can be paralleled to the reactions of a new migrant when not readily welcomed within a racially different culture. Borrowing Hall's ideas on diasporic experiences and hybridity explains the situation of a young bride taken as a migrant into a new family. Even after becoming a mother herself, she remains an immigrant for a long time. She finds it hard to assimilate, experiencing a barrier which functions as a covert form of racism. She may feel like a 'native' or 'minority in a larger unit. So as Hall says: ". . . both 'minority groups' and 'natives' may withdraw into an exclusive and conservative reassertion of their 'roots'"(McDowell 212). Similarly, the bride starts over-identifying with her own home. The new migrant feels psychologically pressured to develop greater national pride and stick to his own kind. A similar reaction can be observed in the new bride who now allies herself firmly to her natal family, an identification which includes her children, and excludes her husband and his family. This phenomenon can be studied as a strong reaction to the pressure of the hegemonic discourse; a silent female subversion of the dominant ideology which exists as a part of 'women's culture' in all parts of India and through all strata of society. Deshpande lyrically evokes the image of a girl's love for her natal home:

The songs, stories, the legends that have sprung up around women's 'mother's homes' as a fountainhead of love and caring grew out of a reality: a woman's need for love that took account of her as a person, not a figure fitting into a role. 'When I was a girl...' a woman wistfully says and it is as if that girl is the real her. (120)

In Indian marriages it is never a light matter for husbands and wives to discuss families. In this situation of 'yours' and 'mine', the concept of 'ours' is usually missed out. A.M. Shah's studies of Hindu households reveal that :

Difficulties arise on a number of matters. While parents and sons have many common habits and tastes, daughters-in-law differ from one another and from the mother-in-law in this matter, because each daughter-in-law brings with her habits

and tastes acquired in her natal home. . . . Every daughter-in-law is also extremely sensitive about comments and criticisms, her in-laws make on her natal kin and about the way they treat the latter during visits to her affinal home. (85)

The concept of the couple forging themselves as a strong individual unit is quite alien to most newly married couples within the socio-cultural milieu. The extended natal families of both spouses encourage this feeling of marital divisiveness.

The fictional narratives studied reflect this tendency common to most Indian urban upper and upper middle-class families. Similarly Divakaruni's Mrs Sanyal's insistence on Sudha's abortion because of the foetus being female and therefore breaking the Sanyal family tradition of male first-borns is another instance of collective family pressure leading to marital disruptions. There is no allowance for the married couple to exist without this dual tension. Alliances continually have to be negotiated to maintain an inequitable social fabric intact. Apart from age, the level of hegemony prevalent within individual homes would also act as an influencing factor. Indian middle class couples can easily situate themselves as cultural insiders for greater identification of the novels' discourses. The consumer's response would also vary with the individual consumer's conceptions of 'home' as highly or marginally inclusive of the extended family.

A core argument of this thesis is reinforced repeatedly in the novels; the families of younger married couples attempt to discourage every move toward spousal closeness, especially in extended family situations. Roy writes: "As for her relationship with her husband for the first year of her marriage, apart from sleeping together, the new bride may have very little contact with him during the daytime"(94). The lack of social approbation for husband-wife intimacy and consequently, the tremendous conservatising capacity of the situation on marriage as an institution appears to have gone unnoticed by scholars, to a great degree. In the Indian cultural discursive strategies, this matter has often been relegated to a background of general women's issues and social problem theories. Earlier Indian male theorists were often critical of the issue of family induced marriage problems and put them down to congenital female inability to co-exist. Some like Nirad Chaudhari<sup>160</sup> were scathing. Chaudhari comes across as highly insensitive toward a vital socio-cultural problem as he writes:

Here I touch upon one of the fundamental aberrations of Indian life--- the mother-in-law- daughter-in-law relationship. . . . those accursed homes in which the mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law live together, only heaven knows why, they are always smouldering from the fire of lovers' kisses and mothers' sighs. (164)

What Chaudhari does not clarify is that it is the dominant gender order that perpetrates the injustices and leaves the homes accursed, not the whims of two conflicting women. And yet, of course, it is also a dominant order that numbers of female characters assimilate and internalise. Divakaruni's Mrs. Sanyal has suffered at the hands of her husband's family. Yet, Sudha "could feel emanating from her, solid as a wall of fire, her loyalty to the Sanyal family"(178). In Gramscian terms, she has been led to believe that perpetuating the line of the Sanyals is to her advantage. In leading Ramesh to divorce Sudha she loses her granddaughter and a good daughter-in-law who started marriage with feelings of respect toward her. Mrs. Sanyal has been a loser. The subversive element again emerges through the medium of fiction. But the reader, especially one who identifies as a cultural insider might interpret such a condition as common and unchanging. Gramsci advises that such an attitude toward the dominant ideologies leads to a consent which

then, becomes essentially passive. It emerges not so much because the masses profoundly regard the social order as an expression of their aspirations as because they lack the conceptual tools, the 'clear theoretical consciousness', which would enable them effectively to comprehend and act on their discontent. (Femia 44)

The novels are located within a cultural discourse that though fictional, resembles closely that of the upper-middle class Indian audiences; whereby the dominant discourse regards married couples almost as illicit lovers engaging in an adulterous relationship if they overtly display their affection for each other. Within the social fabric of any country, good marriages are strengthening factors. Constant familial manoeuvres to subvert the peaceful progress of the relationship that are culturally and socially endemic are seen as detrimental to the social well-being of a nation at large.



The cross section of Indian society reflected in the fiction comprises approximately 450 to 500 million people. Within this social segment there are again millions suffering under the pressures of the hegemonic discourse. Daily undercurrents of strife and tension in routine life are difficult for human beings to deal with, rendering them less able to function well, thereby affecting their careers, academic study, and most importantly their child-rearing abilities. Keeping a majority of people uneasy by any possible means and ensuring that generational repression and pressures do not slacken inevitably generates issues of social control. As a system of social control, in Gramscian terms, it might almost amount to coercive control in order to pressurise the younger married couples to conform to the dominant traditional discourses.

These constraints do not absolve the younger married couples (especially those who have undergone arranged marriages) of all responsibility for the direction of their marriages. If necessary, they can push themselves beyond the shadow of parental marriages, shedding burdens carried from past parent-child conflicts. Such an effort is a step toward a more concrete foundation for a marriage. Deshpande's book emerges as the most powerful text of the four. When Sumi marries Gopal, she does so for herself. She does not carry the past of her parents' tormented marital relationship into her own marriage. What she and Gopal achieve is a friendship and respect and liking for each other as persons, which lasts beyond the marriage and death itself. The most evocative moment and the highlight of the novel itself is Sumi's final realisation of the completeness of her life with Gopal and its total contrast to her parents' marriage. At their last meeting, she tells Gopal: "I know now my life is not like my mother's. Our life, yours and mine was complete" (Deshpande 222). It signifies a finally graceful close to a very good marriage between friends; one in which excessive family interference has not occurred owing to the strength of the marital relationship and the innate decency of the extended families.

Yet, in spite of the lack of family pressure, even this marriage between friends comes to an end. The author appears to shift to yet another subversive course leaving room for counter-hegemonic analysis. Sumi emerges as the complete individual and woman of great strength in her ability to confer the final emotional freedom to Gopal, who reacts

ecstatically to her gift: “She’s setting me free, she’s giving it to me, what I wanted so much, the dream which I had locked into myself, for so many years, the dream of being totally free (ibid). Deshpande makes it clear that the man had no chance of spiritual release unless gifted the same by the wife. Therefore, Sumi always is and will be by far the stronger character in comparison to Gopal. He seeks *Vanaprastha* at the wrong time. In spite of abandonment, she is able to shoulder further responsibilities and reconstruct her grief and anger into positive rebuilding instruments. The novel can thus be read as the pinnacle of female hopes; the thought that the patriarchal world is not only redundant but the woman can dispense with its inequitable systems and be sufficient unto herself. The novel can, then, be read as a vital instrument of social change.

The novel opens with a quote from the *Brhad-aranyaka Upanishad*,<sup>161</sup> where the ancient philosopher, Yajnavalkya, announces his intention of renunciation to his wife. The culturally conversant audience would easily grasp this ideology as an essential principle of traditional Hinduism. A deeper analysis of this quote leads a reader to think that Gopal manipulates the traditional Hindu ideology of renunciation into an excuse enabling him to discard family responsibilities, as a result of his own psychological uncertainties. Lakshmi Mani rightly remarks that “the irony here is that the lines of division between genuine renunciation on the path to seeking one’s spiritual identity and copping out from the burdens of domesticity are blurred” (Mani 2003).

A certain section of the audience might then question whether Gopal could have abandoned his immediate family in this arbitrary manner in a more hegemonically oriented extended family situation. Within the traditional Hindu cultural discourse, “a husband’s obligations to his wife included his duty to be an ethical and moral example and to protect, cherish and care for her”(Ross 160-1). The advocates of the patriarchal discourse can use this novel as a warning against constantly over-stepping the bounds of the dominant ideologies. They might construe Gopal’s leaving as a direct consequence of the excessive freedom within the marital relationship between him and Sumi.

The reader located within the discourses of middle class Hindu India would wonder at the utter lack of a sense of responsibility in Gopal. Kalyani and Goda worry about the girls' marriages (Deshpande 124). Here Sumi appears almost naïve: "Gopal and I never thought of our daughters' marriage, never as a problem, anyway. Maybe we should have taken out marriage policies in their names . . ." (ibid). In spite of their liberalised cultural ideologies, she and Gopal are very much a part of a particular established section of Indian society. Her naivete in remaining ignorant of the rigid rules governing marriage and relationships in India is surprising.

Gopal's selfishness assumes immense proportions since his inner self-seeking commences at a stage where he has the responsibility of three teenage daughters at various educational levels. In contrast, Devi's mother-in-law Parvatiamma, prior to embarking on a similar renunciation had ensured that she placed Mayamma in charge to run the household (Hariharan 63). The writer indicates that even in that final moment of leaving the householder's world, the woman had taken care to see that the household structure does not collapse. She had transferred responsibility, unlike Deshpande's Gopal who had merely abandoned everything and moved off. Here family domination does not exist but what does exist is Gopal's self-indulgent quest. But ironically his quest also starts from his mental queries about his father who had been his mother's brother-in-law. Upon learning that his sister Sudha is actually his half sister, Gopal as an adolescent cannot reconcile himself to this fact. In spite of finding no trace of an illicit relationship he feels: "my father was never a father to me—not after I knew their story. He was my mother's guilty partner, he was Sudha's uncle, her stepfather, he was my mother's husband" (Deshpande 43). The reader can interpret these as the feelings of an adolescent moving within hegemonic discourses. But in not making any effort toward mental reconciliation, Gopal shows glimpses of a parochial mind and there is again the Indian obsession with the past and ultimately the obsession with family, an inability to let the past rest and focus on the marriage itself.

Family domination is also reflected in the apparent inability on the part of the fictional characters to extend their marital interactions into friendships based on liking and mutual

respect. This phenomenon can be linked with the dictates of the predominant Indian socio-cultural discourse which discourages platonic male-female friendships to a great extent. Sudha and Anju (*Sister of My Heart*) both fall in love at first sight. They know nothing about the men they profess to love. An element of fantasy constantly plays a part, as elaborated on in Chapter Two. Neither has ever interacted with men as friends and so a young man falls into the category of a sharply delineated fascinating 'other'. Romantic wish fulfilment is a vital part of this fantasy. Anju reiterates time and again that she is in love with Sunil (140). There arises in the mind of a reader the central question as to whether she has ever been in a relationship of friendship with Sunil. In Anju's case, the power of Western literature functions instead of the power of the cinematic discourse. Her constant reading of English literary works by feminist authors such as Woolf leads her to superimpose those thinking patterns on a culturally completely alien social structure. Her automatic assumption that her future husband will be emotionally compatible with her based on the idea that he too reads Woolf, carries within it strong elements of fantasy.

Again Deshpande's novel moves away from the usual course by exposing the conditions that make for the functioning of the dominant ideology. Her characters move easily between the world of men and women. In fact, Gopal's portrayal by the author is that of a man with whom women find empathy, "who could cross the barrier between the sexes with ease, who was able to do something most men found hard---present his whole self to a female, not just a part of himself "(107). Amongst the younger generations, romance based on mutual liking is explored through the relationships of Hrishi and Charu and Aru and Rohit.

Reverting back to the manner in which the marriages are arranged and accepted (for example, Anju in *Sister of My Heart* and Devi in *The Thousand Faces of Night*) by the younger generation, especially the girls, could be also traced to the socio-cultural discourse propagated by Indian commercial cinema. Such cinema exercises a specific influence, the social impact of which has been explored in Chapter Two. This cinematic discourse runs parallel to the hegemonic discourse, further bolstering it by addition of

extra-conservative elements. This manner of supporting the conservatising elements of the dominant discourse finally results in the creation of a strategy of repression and control, which often appears to cross the border line between coercive and consensual control and completely discards good sense in favour of dominant popular ideologies.

In 1994, Sooraj Barjatya's film *Hum Aapke Hain Kaun*, broke box office records. Loosely translated as 'Who am I to You?', the movie resembles nothing more than a four hour long video film of an upper middle class Northern Indian wedding with special musical effects. The critic, Pratik Joshi writes that the film: "though dismissed in a pre-release assessment as a wedding home video, ended up earning an estimated profit of \$20.8 million"(131). In the film, in an arranged bride-viewing ceremony, the young and pretty girl falls in love with the very personable and educated groom selected by her parents and immediately consents to the marriage. The man reciprocates her emotions and the wedding with all its accompanying festivities is shown in great detail. The commercial success of this film, especially in urban India, is a perfect instance of the pervasive influence of such movies. The film influenced bridal fashions of the day and acted as a blueprint for numerous wedding celebrations amongst upper middle class Hindu families.

This concept of a contemporary version of the sudden appearance of a knight on a white charger appears on such evidence to be deeply embedded within the Indian female psyche. Modern systems of education might have modified the ideas to some extent but they are further strengthened by the presence of English romance novels (Mills and Boon, Silhouette, Harlequin and others) easily available in India. These have been discussed in detail in Chapter Two.

Further insights into this issue, can be found within Divakaruni's fiction. Anju particularly, is a well-read, modern young girl who falls in love with her proposed groom on sight and expects him to reciprocate similarly. She also anticipates that their marriage will satisfy all emotional, intellectual and physical needs of both. She does not foresee romance cinematically as singing love songs; rather: "I look forward to the evenings

when we'll read *To the Lighthouse* to each other"(129), she dreams. Her disappointment is acute at Sunil's lack of acquiescence in fulfilling this part of her dream. When Sunil refuses to read Woolf along with her saying all that "arty –farty stuff"(Divakaruni 198) is not for him and he had merely pretended to like it in order to woo her, Anju reacts with severe disappointment mingled with anger: "My cheeks burned. I felt cheated, used"(ibid).

Chapter Three explored the rearing of the Indian girl-child within a discourse compounded of ancient mythological tales of love, valour and dutiful acts and its constant emphasis on the ideology similar to the eternal quality of true love. They often substitute for the fairy tales read by the young girl in the West. But the modern Indian girl, such as the convent educated younger generation within the narratives, would grow up on a combination of the traditional tales and ancient myths mixed in with a constant dose of commercial Hindi cinema and American Star TV from the cable television network. Educated middle class Indian women often vividly recall their own experiences, how their mind absorbed all the tales of the old heroes and ancient gods (culled from *the Amar Chitra Katha*<sup>162</sup> range of comics, along with their mothers' and grandmothers' bedtime tales), the stories by Enid Blyton and Western fairy tales and the never-ending round of Hindi and regional films watched on video by female members of the family. The ideas, absorbed from a combination of all these sources and a convent school education appears to blend into a centralised discourse that is peculiarly upper middle class urban Indian. They also grow up with an innate awareness of the fact that they would be married, looked after by a man and would live happily ever after (if they kept within gendered discourses). Everything else in life was secondary.

Such cultural hegemony acting on the psyche of young girls prior to marriage represents a form of the Gramscian notion of consensual control operating in their lives within the framework of the socio-cultural discourse. Such consensual control can easily move across the finely drawn boundaries, transforming into coercive control. The lives of Anju and Sudha (*Sister of My Heart*) vividly illustrate such a situation. A simple transgression of boundaries such as watching Hindi movies and talking to a young man results in

Sudha having to leave school and prepare for an arranged marriage to Ramesh. Further consequences of the issue lead to Anju having similarly to get married prior to finishing her education (69-99).

The fictional narratives do not depict many instances of friendships within marriages, probably because the fiction anchors itself to certain specific social realities. There are exceptions such as the happy relationship between Goda and Satya (*A Matter of Time*), but the authors in general have portrayed the norm in the marital situations within upper middle class urban Indian society. The greatest exception is Deshpande's sketching of Sumi and Gopal's relationship and to some extent Goda and Satya's relationship amongst the older protagonists. Even marriages amongst the younger generations conform to the type. Marriages such as Devi and Mahesh's and Ramesh and Sudha's conform to hegemonic marriage systems in which families achieve precedence over individuals. Regarding Indian arranged marriages, Uberoi explains:

Marriage, . . . , is not simply a relationship between two individuals. More than that, it links two social groups. This is the reason why the choice of partners is rarely an individual matter, and why marriage is usually marked by religious rituals, public festivities and, very often, the exchange of goods and services. (Uberoi 232)

Sunil and Anju's (*Sister of My Heart*) marital relationship commences positively in America. Their rhythm of their daily life as expressed in Anju's letters to Sudha appears to incorporate all the aspects of an average harmonious marital relationship (190-1). But both partners carry into the marriage the burden of their pasts and family problems. The story also includes serious impediments in the form of Sunil's unacknowledged attraction for Sudha and Anju's knowledge of the same (174 & 199). But the biggest stumbling block to a peaceful husband-wife interaction appears to be the pressure imposed by family ties and related problems. Anju's constant phone calls to Calcutta and Sunil's desire to pay back all the money given by his father lead to financial pressures within the marriage. Natal homes of both spouses do not appear as support bases, but rather as originating sources of conflict.

Here again, Deshpande clearly moves away from the fictional norm. Home for Sumi and her sister Premi, was the centre of their parents' tortured marriage. But for Sumi, The Big House (her natal home) later acts as a sanctuary, accepting her daughters and herself back into the fold after Gopal's departure. "The "Big House" is an important symbol in the novel. It represents "stability in a world of flux" (Mani 2003). The name of the house itself is '*Vishwas*' signifying trust. Unlike the men, the women can place their trust in the house.

Friendship within a male-female relationship is seen in the easy camaraderie between Charu and Hrishi (*A Matter of Time*) and also in the strong bond between Rohit and Aru (ibid). But family as an incipient problem appears even in these non-conformist relationships. For instance Hrishi's mother Devaki (who is also Sumi's cousin) disapproves of the closeness between her son and Charu as Sumi is perceptive enough to notice. Sumi also understands the importance of family situations in a marriage. Kalyani had been always worried about the impact of Gopal's desertion on the girls' marriages. Devaki's phone call to her son sets Sumi thinking, Sumi

cannot forget the edge of anger in Devaki's voice. Its not because Hrishi is late, its because he is here, with us, with Charu. I've seen her looking at Hrishi and Charu . . . Devi loves me, she is fond of my girls, . . . It's the idea of Hrishi and Charu that she doesn't like. With their position and money, she's more ambitious for Hrishi. (125)

It would appear that the pattern might be repeated. But the authors are also presenting the younger generation as points of future resistance toward reform of the hegemonic discourse. Gramsci's concept of moral and intellectual reform could be used to understand the messages underlying the socio-cultural discourse of the novels. Gramsci, talking of reform in Marxist terms, wrote:

The subordination of the workers and peasants is due to their inability to develop a type of intellectual and a type of culture independent from those of the ruling groups. Intellectual and moral reform is the movement of the popular masses toward the creation of such an intellectual and such a culture. Such a development is necessary if the masses are to achieve a conception of the world that is not a mere reflection of the ideas and values of the dominant groups. (Fontana 25)



In the narratives, the subversion of the hegemonic order from within and the resolution of the novels leave the reader with the idea that the authors hope for the formation of a new breed of thinkers amongst the younger generation. Younger characters such as Rohit, Aru, Charu, Hrishi (*A Matter of Time*), Anju, Sudha, (*Sister of My Heart*) Devi (*The Thousand Faces of Night*) and Kamini (*Tamarind Mem*) represent this new breed who are willing to make efforts to break the shackles of the obsolete traditional discourse. Within the literary discourse, there is a constant and specific subversion of the hegemonic discourse, which in turn leads to certain similarities in the resolution of the texts.

Unlike the older generation, the younger women protagonists all move away from the traditional cultural norms to lead lives in which they themselves frame the rules of their existence. They choose paths away from being mere wives and mothers and assert themselves as individuals. In certain cases, the older community of females indirectly bolsters the value-systems created by the younger generation. Saroja exhorts Kamini to construct her own life away from family pressures. Robbie Clipper Sethi further analyses this phenomenon : “Moreover, Kamini’s own escape from the dependency of marriage somehow fulfils the legacy of sharp-tongued women in her family, suggesting that there is a place in the world for tamarind mems, though it may lie beneath the snows of North America”(2003). Devi in eloping with a musician lover flouts all dominant ideologies of caste, community and society; but gathers the courage to return and seek her mother’s love. Sita is seen waiting for her daughter (Hariharan 139). Similarly, in her anguish at a miscarriage and a marriage fraught with lack of compatibility, Anju seeks Sudha and Sudha leaves the security of a proposed marriage with Ashok for the unknown terrain of America and Anju. Sumi achieves complete personal and spiritual enlightenment in the moment prior to death : “a glimpse of duality, . . . , the duality that ends all fragmentation and knits the world together . . . .” (Deshpande 238) and Aru stays on as Kalyani’s bulwark after Sumi’s death claiming: “I am your daughter, Amma, I am your son”(233).

The novels reaffirm the ability of women to bond together and protect each other, lending moral and emotional support. Patriarchal hegemony does not seem to exercise real inner control. The discourse is always being very subtly subverted by the women for their own

ends. It appears similar to the village women's subversion of the epics, *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*. Referring to the influence of the epic poem *Ramayana* on Indian social discourse, the poet and literary scholar, Nabaneeta Dev Sen writes:

Just as the Rama myth has been exploited by the patriarchal Brahminical system to construct an ideal Hindu male, Sita too has been built up as an ideal Hindu female to help serve the system. The impact is far-reaching. Although Sita's life can hardly be called a happy one, she remains the ideal women through whom the patriarchal values may be spread far and wide, through whom women may be taught to bear all injustice silently... But there are alternative ways of using a myth. If patriarchy has used the Sita myth to silence women, the village women have picked up the Sita myth to give themselves a voice. They have found a suitable mask in the myth of Sita, a persona through which they can express themselves, speak of their day-to-day problems, and critique patriarchy in their own fashion. ... In the women's retellings, the Brahminical Rama myth is blasted automatically though, probably, unwittingly. Here Rama comes through as a harsh, uncaring and weak-willed husband, a far cry from the ideal man. . . This is possible because the women's songs are outside the canon. Women's Sita myth where Sita is a woman, flourishes only on the periphery. The male Sita myth where she is a *devi*, continues in the mainstream. In the women's retelling, Sita is no rebel; she is still the yielding, suffering wife, but she speaks of her sufferings, of injustice, of loneliness and sorrow.

(Manushi /Issue 108)

In the epics and in some fiction, the folkloric nature of the female discourse subverts patriarchy openly, but no objections are raised as it is excused on grounds of folk or women's culture. Folk culture therefore evades the control of the dominant popular culture. Therefore, because there are instances of struggle within the discourse, acquiescence to the consensual control is by no means passive. The novels portray this lack of passivity specifically through instances of female solidarity, a perpetuation of feminine supportiveness in the face of oppressive hegemony as seen in Anju and Sudha's love for each other:

*... I slip an arm around Sudha and support Dayita cautiously with the other. Sudha places her arm under mine, so we're both holding Dayita up. If a passer-by . . . looked at us, she would see that we've formed a tableau, two women, their arms intertwined like lotus stalks, smiling down at the baby between them. Two women who have travelled the vale of sorrow, and the baby who will save them, who has saved them already. Madonnas with child.*

*Sister of My Heart (340)*

## CONCLUSION

This study explores the interactions within arranged marriages in Hindu urban society in fictional narratives. The conflicts arising in the interactions are mostly a result of the vested interests operating within the hegemonic discourse which strives to constantly prevent the married couple from creating a relationship based on firm foundations of liking, friendship and respect and ultimately love.

In modern society, it can be argued that the arranged marriage is an obsolete monstrosity which should be discarded completely as a social practice. But it is an unalterable fact that in one form or another, arranged marriage is a prominent feature of the Indian social structure. Urban Indian society does not show any signs of completely discarding this practice. What is remarkable is the versatility and adaptability within this practice itself. Arranged marriage systems move along with the times, merely altering the outer trappings. Like hegemony, they readapt and survive by transforming superficially, as required by the times (see Chapter Five). Arranged marriage systems in India function mainly within guidelines dictated by the hegemonic socio-cultural discourse.

The texts under analysis are different in stylistic and narrative features, but are rooted within the Hindu Brahminical social systems whose discourses predominantly structure the marriage patterns. In all the narratives the marriages of the protagonists exhibit merely surface variations. Differences based on community, regional and generational patterns are noted; for instance, Saroja (*Tamarind Mem*) is not allowed to communicate with her future husband prior to marriage; but younger protagonists such as Anju (*Sister of My Heart*) and Devi (*The Thousand Faces of Night*) are allowed to interact with their prospective bridegrooms within strictly regimented outlines of propriety. But what is really prominent are the Hindu Brahminic socio-cultural similarities. Divakaruni, Hariharan and Badami portray their main protagonists within arranged marriage scenarios. Deshpande's novel deals with both the arranged marriage of Kalyani and Shripati and the 'love match' between Gopal and Sumi.

What emerges constantly is the highly exploitative and manipulative role played by the extended families on both sides which bolster the oppressive patriarchal discourse and corrode the foundations of a marriage almost before it has begun. The most striking example of this is the marriage of Sudha and Ramesh (*Sister of My Heart*). Divakaruni's narration skilfully portrays that neither Mrs. Sanyal nor Nalini as mothers take any constructive step to cement the marriage; rather they create conditions conducive to its destruction. In the tradition-bound Indian society where the importance of love and unity within the extended family is constantly reiterated as a dominant socio-cultural feature (see Chapters Two, Three and Five), the narratives move within the social discourses with an ironic eye, to explore the murky undercurrents of ubiquitous vested interests beneath the disguise of family commitment and unity.

This study analyses that in a society which emphasises its rootedness within ancient cultural traditions, the worst transgressions of time-honoured discourses take place, as most ancient customs based on ethical perspectives are replaced by those serving vested group interests. In the novels, it is observed that concurrent with social realities, hegemonic ideology based on medieval Puranic systems are followed, relegating the ethical ideals of Vedic and Upanishadic Hinduism to a secondary status. The flagrant disregard of the ancient socio-religious discourses regarding marital relationships are observed. Chapter One points out that the Hindu marriage ceremony and mantras of the Hindu marriage contain the word 'friend'. This concept itself has been diluted within the systems of the contemporary Hindu marriage. The modern Indian concept is now to ensure that a superior-subordinate status is constantly followed within the marital discourse. Another deviation from the traditional discourse is the treatment of daughters. Chapters Three, Four and Five contain information regarding the normal position occupied by the girl-child in Hinduism in ancient India, which in modern India has transmuted into a very distinct culture of gender-discrimination. Every one of women's empowering tools were stripped away over time. (see Chapters One, Four and Five). The novels echo this trend in the constant disempowerment of the female protagonists. But the novels also stress the irony of constant connivance of the women at the disabling of their own sex. Sita (*The Thousand Faces of Night*) Nalini (*Sister of My Heart*),

Manorama (*A Matter of Time*) provide illustrative references of the above-mentioned social paradox. They all aid the discourse which causes such pain to their own offspring. Most of the novels illustrate the lack of a truly compatible marital relationship that endures defying the cultural hegemonies. This is the most pessimistic aspect to the authors' reading of the patriarchal ideologies. Within the narratives, the presence of the hegemonic discourses prevents couples from building fulfilling and meaningful marital relationships free of family pressure and strife.

The ideological framework within which Deshpande's protagonist Sumi operates can be distinguished as a symbol of what "ought to be" rather than "what is". Protagonists like Sumi stand out as beacons of hope. Sumi dies, but leaves behind three daughters who show the power of her legacy in their ability to seek intellectual and emotional fulfilment in life. Sumi's daughters are not just her children, they are each complete individuals in their own right. Deshpande's text is ultimately the most powerful as the women in her novel can stand firm on their own without depending on support from the exploitative hegemonic norms. Without appearing overtly aggressive Deshpande's main female protagonists ensure their survival by bringing out their own inner strengths. The main factor that distinguishes her work from the other narratives is the portrayal of a marriage of two persons who function as individuals with independent perspectives rather than as hegemonic mouthpieces or victims of patriarchy. Finally Deshpande's text emerges as the one with a powerful message of hope for the next generations. Relationships between Rohit and Aru and Charu and Hrishi portend hope for the future; a future that will lead to marriages based on individual choice, which in turn, is based on mutual respect and liking as well as romantic love. This text leaves the audience buoyant with hope for the next generation of protagonists as well as marriage in modern urban India.

The narratives contain an unusual element of subtly conveying an image of the mother-figure as destroyer. It is a direct subversion of the socio-cultural discourse which emphasises the mother as a permanently nurturing figure within Indian society. Chapters One, Two and Three discuss the pivotal place occupied by mothers in the lives of children, especially male children. Within the fiction, the mother appears as a destructive

Kali rather than a nurturing Durga. They are the main destroyers of the children's lives and marriages. Divakaruni's Mrs. Sanyal is the perfect prototype of the mother devouring her young. Male tyranny and injustice does not arise as the main issue within these texts, the men are as much victims of the discourse as are the women.

Gramsci's theories form the mainstay of the thesis simply because his concept of hegemony is vital in understanding the crucial factor eroding the marriages within the texts. What an analysis of hegemony achieves is that it helps expose the force of vested interests constantly operating within all dominant socio-cultural discourses. As discussed earlier, the hegemony of one group can be replaced by another; but what really counts is the pressure kept up by the dominant group, the ones whose interests are being served. The novels can occasionally leave the culturally aware reader with a sensation akin to despair as the reader observes one marriage after another succumb to the pressures of hegemonic manipulation. The collapse of these marriages is not usually dramatic in the form of a divorce (Sudha and Ramesh are exceptions), but is slow and insidious; a gradual poisoning of relationships until the marriage dies a slow death.

As explained earlier, the novels whose analysis is contextualised within a Brahminical sub-culture are illustrations of the fact that it is not so much the male-female divide which leads to the creation of the marital rift. The man-woman relationship falters because as husband and wife they bring into the marriage myriad burdens created by their individual natal families and their pasts, which in turn provide a weak base for them to focus exclusively on constructing a stable and united marriage.

Deshpande's novel moves away from the other texts in its portrayal of the dignity of a marriage even in its estrangement. In the other three texts, the marriages appear denuded of all dignity. The reader functioning as cultural insider, experiences almost a sense of personal humiliation watching women such as Saroja (*Tamarind Mem*) and Devi (*The Thousand Faces of Night*) compound their mistakes in their adulterous attempts to covertly thwart the dominant discourses by violating the rules of their solidly entrenched

caste and social identities. Instead of questioning and deconstructing repressive discourses these women are involved in a form of self-humilaiting subterfuge.

At the core of this study is the exploration of the issue of vested interests of natal and in-law families as the ubiquitous factor influencing the marriages within the texts. Linked to it is the social reality upon which these texts draw. Hegemony is the main instrument used by the vested interest groups and pressure groups to ensure their control over the younger married couples. This control is always consensual given the social structure within which it operates. It functions through a method of indoctrination based on traditional discourses which rarely encourages the development of a questioning predisposition on part of the recipient. The Indian historian Uma Chakravarti observes that “men and women in India, whether or not they have formally learnt history, carry with them a sense of the past which they have internalized through the transmission of popular beliefs, mythology, tales of heroism and folklore” (Chakravarti, U. 27).<sup>163</sup>

The hegemonic discourse proliferates through traditional media such as myths and legends, family customs, caste rules; but modern media such as cinema plays a very important role. Chapter Two discusses at length the pervasive influence of commercial Hindi cinema highlighting an often oppressively patriarchal discourse. The cinematic discourse can be observed to have blended into the modern Indian socio-cultural discourse further strengthening the shackles of patriarchy. Idealising romantic love and family ties, it often portrays the marriage bond as subordinate to extended family ties. The fictional texts expose the same ideology operating within society as well. Fulfilment of fantasy as an issue also comes into play within the texts in connection with the theme of cinema as well as the other cultural tools. Ien Ang provides deeper insights into the importance of media effects on personal discourses:

Sentimental and melancholic feelings of masochism and powerlessness, which are the core of the melodramatic imagination, are an implicit recognition, in their surrender to some power outside the subject, of the fact that one can never have everything under control all the time, and that consequently identity is not a question of free and conscious choice but always acquires its shape under circumstances not of one's own making.

(1996 95)

The cultural world of the texts has been explored using the concepts of the cultural insider/outsider and most importantly Trinh T. Minh-ha's concept of the 'in-between zone' characters. These concepts are applicable to audiences, as well as to the textual protagonists. The encoding and decoding of messages within the texts are closely connected to the textual interpretations by the readers.

These concepts further the analyses in Chapters Four, Five and Six, which deal broadly with specific cultural factors such as caste and education which show a strong influence within the texts. Chapter Six is the most vital part of the textual analysis. It analyses the marital interactions within the narratives using all the cultural theories discussed in the earlier chapters.

The cultural world within the novels expresses the dominance of patriarchy within all socio-cultural discourses. But the authors create a parallel world as well using literary techniques of subversion within the hegemonic outlines. What the authors also bring out well is the contradictions prevalent within the dominant discourse itself. Through my analysis I have tried to show that patriarchal hegemony itself is a subversion of the main ideals underlying the basic formation of Hindu society in ancient times. I have referred back time and again to the Vedic ages, often considered as the most enlightened era in Hindu society, in order to describe better the slow destruction caused to a just social structure by groups functioning on the basis of vested interests. Gramsci's idea that with changing times hegemony alters its surface features and hegemony also depends on the group in power is very important in understanding the prevalent social systems within which the narratives operate:

Hegemony is readjusted and re-negotiated constantly. Gramsci said that it can never be taken for granted, in fact during the post-revolutionary phase (when the labour class has gained control) the function of hegemonic leadership does not disappear but changes its character. (Stillo 2004)

The novels cleverly depict the manipulation of hegemony by individuals to serve their own ends. The characters do not always interpret the dominant ideology to suit the vested interests and that is the main source of the fictional conflicts. But most of the protagonists



do not appear to analytically deconstruct the hegemonic controls. They confront it to a certain extent then retreat. Characters such as Sita (*The Thousand Faces of Night*) and Saroja (*Tamarind Mem*) best illustrate this point. As stressed earlier the tragedy is that hegemony is used by myriad family groups to attack the foundations of a marriage almost before it has begun. Hegemony is also instrumental in weakening the bonds between parent and child in the emotional sense stressing only the aspects of duty on the part of the progeny. A socially oppressive cycle of expectation and exploitation ensues. The novels repeatedly bring out these features of the social reality. The main victims of this emotional abuse perpetrated by a self-serving discourse in the guise of culture and tradition are the children of the affected marriages. I have used Gramscian theories consistently within the thesis to emphasise the above points.

The whole socio-cultural discourse of cinema as observed within the narratives serves to bolster patriarchal hegemony. Cinema has followed a pattern from its onset of propagating ideal Hindu virtues as based on Puranic discourses. An instance of hegemonic discourse altering its surface features is seen in the 2003 film *Kuch Na Kaho* where a relationship between a separated woman with a child and a highly eligible bachelor culminates in a happy ending. The heroine repudiates her husband who earlier abandoned her during childbirth asserting she is content to be an ordinary woman staking her claim to happiness in this life and does not desire the title of the 'ideal Sita'. It is a subverting of earlier cinematic traditions. A wonderfully understanding family shows another face of Indian society. But hegemony continues in the woman's need to assert her identification with tradition in not having sought a divorce in seven years of desertion and her constant mental conflict over the role of an ideal Hindu wife; another interesting fact is that the young hero is portrayed as an American Indian, whereby his repudiation of traditional values is self-explanatory. Nevertheless, in this movie there appears a shift in the hegemonic constructs and augurs the chance of relief from the usual blatantly patriarchal discourse of commercial Hindi cinema. Monica Stillo analyses:

Different authors (Foucault, Althusser, feminist theories, etc.) have taken Gramsci's idea of a prominent discourse, reinterpreting and proposing it as a suitable explanation about our culture, the construction of our beliefs, identities, opinions and relations, everything

under the influence of a dominant "common sense". Eventually, we can suggest that the media could operate also as a tool of insurrection. (2004)

It is important to connect the reader with the narratives. The audience is as important as the fiction itself because reading is in itself a process of production (see Fish in Chapters Two and Three). The concepts of cultural insider/outsider helps connect the narratives with the reader. My analysis also emerges from my location as a reader who also functions from an 'in-between zone' perspective.

Within the fiction, the women keep functioning as migrants in their marital homes, never assimilating, clinging to their natal family identities so strongly that their own identities show sharper ties over the years. Ien Ang in her essay "Migrations of Chineseness: Ethnicity in the Postmodern World" discussing migrant issues from various perspectives observes: "for migrants, the relation between 'where you're from' and 'where you're at' is a deeply problematical one." She further states that "What I'm saying is that this very identification with an imagined 'where you're from' is also often a sign of, and surrender to, a condition of actual marginalisation in the place 'where you're at'" (ibid).<sup>164</sup>

The married women in the texts often appear to face similar dilemmas. In their marital homes, especially in the early years of their marriage; they face all the migrants' traumas of struggling to assimilate. In spite of their constant efforts, some like Sudha (*Sister of My Heart*) forever remain the outsider and migrant who ultimately is forced to leave her husband as a result of the blatant discrimination and threats she faces in his home. Sudha is one migrant who never does assimilate. Most of the others struggle on. Most poignant is Kalyani's (*A Matter of Time*) situation as that of an outsider in her own home. But vested interests have ensured that her husband too does not feel like an insider in his wife's natal home; therefore the clear winner is the vested interest in the form of hegemony.

In the same essay, Ang goes on to explain:

Where actual, physical travel, a one-way trip to another place, has disrupted the 'natural'

sense of 'home', 'identity' becomes glaringly linked to, and explicitly constituted by, difference - in very basic, tangible ways. In *Imaginary Homelands*, Salman Rushdie has put it like this:

The effect of mass migrations has been the creation of radically new types of human beings: people who root themselves in ideas rather than in places, in memories as much as in material things; people who have been obliged to define themselves - because they are so defined by others - by their otherness; people in whose deepest selves strange fusions occur, unprecedented unions between what they were and where they find themselves. (ibid)

Ang's theories provide further insight into the situation of the married couples within the narratives. As disparate individuals they develop inner worlds of their own which keep the marital relationship on the periphery of their lives; in spite of identifying themselves as parents and as a couple for social purposes. What they fail to see that is the traps set to their marital distance which are laid by tricky social norms eternally striving to keep them apart in the name of tradition.

These narratives are by women authors who occupy specific positions within particular strata of society and do not attempt to disguise their position. What they explore are the similar discourses within which they place their protagonists. Their protagonists exhibit all the strata-based socio-cultural biases with responses differing on the individual criteria. The authors as women do use the tools of their enemies (Chow 86), but what emerges from the textual analysis is that the enemy is not a natural, but a created enemy. The externalities do not impinge much on the novels. The action is all internalised and what I have explored in my study is the dialogue between the world of the protagonists and the inner world of the readers. Often this authorial style can lead to a rogue response on the part of the audiences. As Deshpande points out that "to apply the tag of feminist is one way, I've realised of dismissing the serious concerns of the novel by labelling them, by calling the work propagandist"(Menon 1996).

The narrative discourse makes it clear that it is not blind adherence to religious and cultural 'isms' that are the main feature in the destruction of marital relationships. What

is vital is the use of these 'isms' to further the hegemonic discourse, which in itself is the discourse of traditional exploitativeness rather than a worship of cultural norms. It permeates the entire social structure and in this study I have analysed various aspects of its huge socio-cultural impact using the narratives as guiding lights. The authors' voices rise in subtle, yet strident protest against the unfair social and cultural dictates which manipulate hegemony to achieve desired objectives. Hegemony has become a powerful instrument in the hands of those placed in a position to wield it.

Sangari and Vaid (9) observe that to a certain extent the Indian middle-class (within whose world these narratives are located) trace their ancestry to rural origins. Therefore they firmly uphold patriarchal traditions. This phenomenon is observed in the novels. The older protagonists in the novels have closer links to the 'native' village roots compared to the younger ones and therefore are greater upholders of patriarchal hegemony. Thus Gourima is unquestioning in her acceptance of her late husband's hegemonic demands whereas Anju is unable to accept the blind adherence to oppressive socio-cultural discourses and constantly questions the need to place a dead husband's wishes over a living daughter's needs (58).

For the textual narratives Dr. Rajvanshi's definition of the contemporary middle-class is highly relevant: "This term denotes the expanding large section of the urban population, who do not do manual work, follow the norms of responsibility, and who are actively concerned with personal advancement"(19). In the context of the middle-class ideology observed within the narratives, defining gender is crucial to the formation of patriarchal ideologies and classes. Women's rights are usually the first to be compromised in order to ensure the smooth functioning of a hegemonically perceived stable and ideal social structure: "the ideologies of women as carriers of tradition often disguise, mitigate, compensate, contest actual changes taking place. Womanhood is often part of an asserted or desired, not an actual cultural continuity"(Sangari and Vaid 17). Within the novels glimpses of the ideas governing the concept of the ideal Hindu woman are observed, even amongst younger men such as Mahesh (*The Thousand Faces of Night*).

Hegemony being innovative readapts the 'Hindu woman' to changing needs. The modern traditional Hindu woman in keeping with the tradition of exploitation functions as 'superwoman', as mother, wife, daughter, in-law, career woman and steps into any other role that needs filling. The highly stressful situation faced by women in the novels in all their roles, as well as the pressures faced by a married couple as a unit stem from the indifference of the upholders of the hegemonic discourse to anything except furtherance their own interests. Ien Ang's analyses on migrant issues provide further insights in the matter:

It has a lot to do with the indifference of the dominant culture, and the dominant can't do very much about it either because they live in their own culture, which affords them a certain cultural unselfconsciousness. They have the privilege of not having to question their own identities, ethnicities and cultural specificities. <sup>165</sup>(Ang with Zournazi)

The need to move beyond this kind of group-serving hegemony is observed in the fictional narratives and Gramscian theories on communal values as outlined by Morera (see Chapter One) lend further weight to the need for the creation of a fairer socio-cultural discourse.

The narratives draw upon the social realities within contemporary urban Indian society, whose inhabitants are too preoccupied with the outer vestiges of their lives in the forms of careers and education (mainly male prerogatives) and socio-cultural activities to question the factors motivating the dominant discourses (see Chapter Two). Strinati observes:

People can accept the prevailing order because they are compelled to do so by devoting their time to 'making a living', or because they cannot conceive another way of organising society, and therefore fatalistically accept the world as it is. This, moreover, assumes that the question why people should accept a particular social order is the only legitimate question to ask. It can be claimed that an equally legitimate question is why should people not accept a particular social order? (174)

The novels show the intrinsic flaws within the system of arranged marriage in India. The custom of taking people of different temperaments, grouping them together and expecting them to function harmoniously simply on the basis of indoctrination by

patriarchal discourses, does not lead to founding stable and happy families. The differences between the main groups of insiders and outsiders form the basis of greater discord and conflict with each group stressing its specific identity. Ien Ang observes:

For example, in the United States the whole idea of the melting pot turned out not to work. People started to claim their racial and ethnic differences. As a result of this articulation, societies now define themselves in more pluralist and multicultural terms. From within that space, it has become possible to take up 'ethnic' positions in more assertive ways .

Here racism becomes the easiest option and it is a very defensive racism. It is not the aggressive racism that the Nazis had, for example. It is a racism born of fear and a feeling that others are coming into your space, and that is what's happening when Pauline Hanson says, 'where do I go?' White Australians are faced with the challenge to rearticulate themselves within the nation, which they now have to share with so many foreigners. This is incredibly traumatic for many people. (Ang with Zournazi)

It is a clear system of racism based on the individual 'outsider' family status of the new couple, which is exercised by the families within which the married couples interact. The old British policy of divide and rule is observed in application within the novels. Husbands are first taught that it is highly important to preserve their individuality. Ramesh's mother (*Sister of My Heart*) taunts him with his preference for Sudha's pretty face over family duty and Saroja's mother constantly points out the physical flaws inherent in Saroja's husband's family. Chapter Three discussed the Indian socio-cultural discourse containing an image of a wife as devouring goddess obtaining a sexual stranglehold over the husband alienating him from his extended family. From a clearer perspective, it appears as another psychological ploy containing mythical overtones to foster constant disruption in marital relationships by bringing the couple to an awareness of all duties excluding their duty to each other. It is a highly effective use of patriarchal hegemonic discourses. Dominic Strinati's ideas afford further insights:

It can be argued that Gramsci's theory suggests that subordinated groups accept the ideas, values and leadership of the dominant group not because they are physically or mentally induced to do so, nor because they are ideologically indoctrinated, but because they have reasons of their own. (166)

Ang's discussions on discrimination based on group affiliations continue to provide further glimpses into the intricate socio-cultural discourses effectively used in constructing the texts:

There is, of course, the legendary commitment to one's ancestral home and devotion to family, coupled with the important value of filial piety, which are often foregrounded as key characteristics of traditional Chinese culture. Such traditional isms would presumably account for the high level of what Pan calls 'clannishness' among overseas Chinese communities. Furthermore, 'tribal feeling' can be aroused among people when they feel ostracised in the place 'they're at' as a result of rampant racial discrimination - an experience any person of Chinese descent living in the West will know.

(Ang, "Migrations of Chineseness")

These comments on filial piety and ancestral attachment are highly relevant with regard to this particular study of Indian socio-cultural discourses. It is this discourse whose shackles need to be loosened and this can only be done by the formation of altogether a new hegemonic culture subservient to the interests of the married couple as a unit with their children.

The key to 'revolutionary' social change in modern societies does not therefore depend, as Marx had predicted, on the spontaneous awakening of critical class consciousness but upon the prior formation of a new alliances of interests, an alternative hegemony or 'historical bloc', which has already developed a cohesive world view of its own.

(Williams 27)

The above argument can be interpreted constructively by couples undergoing arranged marriages, to formulate a 'historical bloc' within which the hegemony of furthering their own relationship and nurturing their own children takes priority over all other struggles of vested interests within extended family politics. Only Deshpande's text contains elements of this new form of hegemony; but it too is lost in the quagmire of Gopal's irrelevant soul-searching. Irrelevant, because it cannot in any way logically be prioritised above the needs of his young children and his relationship with Sumi.

Protagonists as married couples rarely if ever appear to achieve marital happiness as two individuals who have come together. The resultant conflicts always spill over into family

life. The need to overcome the apathy of submission to the dominant discourse on the part of the protagonists in order to formulate a new hegemony to ensure happiness within marriages and nuclear families cannot be emphasised enough. It is the foundation of the larger society's peace and stability. The above sentences are equally applicable to the sub-section of Indian society within which the fiction rests, and a huge proportion of which is still in the throes of hegemonic dominance serving vested interests in a vicious and never-ending cycle.

Gramsci theorised:

Critical self-consciousness means, historically and politically, the creation of an élite of intellectuals. A human mass does not 'distinguish' itself, does not become independent in its own right without, in the widest sense, organising itself; and there is no organisation without intellectuals, that is without organisers and leaders... But the process of creating intellectuals is long and difficult, full of contradictions, advances and retreats, dispersal and regrouping, in which the loyalty of the masses is often sorely tried.

(Hoare and Nowell-Smith 334)

This study observes a need for organic intellectuals, which in the novels are people like Sumi. These individuals have the ability to utilise the critical consciousness they develop to bring new perspectives into the socio-cultural discourse and lessen the strength of the exploiting monopoly of patriarchal hegemony. With the creation of these organic intellectuals and greater development of critical consciousness, even within arranged marriages marital relationships could become quite fulfilling in themselves so that hegemony cannot corrode their strength and beauty.

In an interview Divakaruni speaking of her writing, claims that she breaks with Indian traditional cultural discourses and stresses female friendships: "In the best friendships I have had with women there is a closeness that is unique, a sympathy that comes from somewhere deep and primal in our bodies and does not need explanation, perhaps because of the life-changing experiences we share" ("San Francisco Examiner", February 28, 1999). But this study goes beyond the concept of female bonding and interrogates why such bonding cannot take place between husbands and wives. A married couple



share many life changing experiences too, they become parents, share greater physical intimacy than in any other relationship, face hardships and successes together; especially within a cultural discourse where the divorce rate is still comparatively low, they are together for a lifetime. They have to strive toward an awareness and development of critical consciousness which allows them to function as organic intellectuals. Such an awareness could well ensure that they become each other's best friend for life and in essence they revert to the basic concepts of the ancient Hindu marriage system that of being friends and each other's best counsel and support for life.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> A. Beteille, "Caste in Contemporary India." in C.J. Fuller, ed., Caste Today (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1996)151.

<sup>2</sup> H.N. Chatterjee, Forms of Marriage in Ancient India (1972) 4. He provides as a footnote, no. 11 of the Chapter on general observations (1-91), the Roman Law in Latin: "*Nuptiae sunt conjunctio maris et feminae et consortium omnis vitae divini et humani juris communicatio*"

<sup>3</sup> Vedas: The earliest of the Indian scriptures, collated into four volumes, named the *Rg Veda*, *Yajur Veda*, *Sama Veda* and *Atharva Veda*, . . . They were later overcome by the *Upanishads*. The word 'Veda' means knowledge. The Vedas generally stand for rituals. "The *Rg Veda* is only the first constituent of a great body of literature known as Vedic by Western scholars and classed by Hindu tradition as 'sruti' , "that which has been directly heard" , as distinct from later religious literature, such as the epics, the *Puranas* and the *Dharma Sastras*, which are known as 'smriti' , "that which has been remembered" The latter class is considered less sacred than the former." --- A.L. Basham, The Origin and Development of Classical Hinduism. Edited and Annotated by K. Zysk (Boston: Beacon Press, 1989) 27.

<sup>4</sup> In Indian sources most information about marriage as an institution is found in the *Dharmasutras* and *sastras*, or the manuals of religious law, of duties and rights, of castes and life stages. The ritual manuals (*Grhyasutras*) give a detailed exposition of the ritual of marriage according to different Vedic schools. Here the most important piece of information is that in addition to the basic Vedic rites, various customs of different countries and social groups must be observed.

The *dharma* authors defined eight different forms of marriage, variously acceptable to different classes. Most often they are quoted from the *Manavadharmasastra*, but they are also found, for instance, in the *Yajnavalkyadharmasastra* and even in the *Asvalaynagrhyasutra*. According to *Manu*, the first four are permissible to the *Brahmans* and include the rites of Brahman (*brahma*), the *gods* (*daiva*), the *rsis* (*arsa*) and *Prajapati* (*prajapatya*), i.e, giving the daughter to a man learned in the veda, to an officiating priest, against a formal gift of cow and bull, and to a suitable bridegroom. The *Ksatriyas* are also permitted the rite of *Raksas* or the forcible abduction of the girl and that of the *Gandharvas* or mutual agreement of the bride and the groom. The rite of the *Asura* or purchase of the bride is hesitatingly allowed to the lower classes, while that of the *Pisacas* (*paisaca*) or seduction of the girl during her sleep, intoxication or confusion is proclaimed forbidden. It has been pointed out that the less acceptable sorts of marriage are perhaps included in the system to give the status of married women to the victims of such acts. This is the classification

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of the *Dharmasastra*, but even these eight forms are by no means exhaustive. One immediately thinks of the *Swayamvara*, a contest of warriors with the bride's hand as the reward. –K. Kattunen, "Mutual Agreement or Auction of Brides: Ancient Indian Marriage in Greek Accounts." A. Parpola and S. Tenuhen, eds. "Changing Patterns of Family and Kinship in South Asia". *Studia Orientalia*, 84 (1998) 31-8 (Helsinki: University of Helsinki, 1998) 33.

<sup>5</sup> Patricia Uberoi, "Family, Household and Social Change" Uberoi, ed., *Family, Kinship and Marriage in India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1993) 383-92.

<sup>6</sup> Hindu scriptural texts containing socio-religious laws and ideas to be remembered for the functioning of society.

<sup>7</sup> *Brahminism and Hinduism* 389 in Padfield (48).

<sup>8</sup> Ununs : Clay ovens using coal as a cooking medium. An important feature of earlier Bengali kitchens.

<sup>9</sup> It is indeed difficult to determine which of the ceremonies is essential and conclusive. The task is fraught with further complications as there are diverse customs, varying from place to place and even from family to family. But there are common features. Asvalayana accordingly states in his *Grhyasutra* that most common of the ceremonials should be observed in marriage. Manu is of the opinion that mantras of marriage (as are pronounced at the time of *Panigrahana*—grasping of the hand of the bride by the husband) lead to wifehood no doubt, but marriage finds completion in the performance of the rite of the *Saptapadi*. . . Medhatithi stresses the importance of the verse of Manu when he observes that consequent to the observance of the rite of *Saptapadi*, a marriage cannot be annulled even if the bride is found to be insane. – H.N. Chatterjee(18).

<sup>10</sup> Veena Das, "Masks and Faces: An Essay on Punjabi Kinship" in Uberoi, ed., (1993) 198-224.

<sup>11</sup> *Asramas* denote stages.

<sup>12</sup> A marital kinship system followed in earlier times amongst certain South Indian caste and family groups.

<sup>13</sup> "Savitri . . . like the Greek Alcestis, followed her husband Satyavant when he was being carried away by the death-god Yama and so impressed the god with her loyalty that he released her lord"(Basham 1967 182).

<sup>14</sup> "Sita . . . faithfully accompanied her husband Rama into exile and endured great hardships and temptations for his sake" (ibid).

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- <sup>15</sup> Gandhari was the wife of the Kaurav king Dhritirashtra. When she realised that her husband was blind, she tied a cloth over her own eyes for the rest of her life.
- <sup>16</sup> Translates from Bangla as ‘husband is the supreme master/teacher’ (Divakaruni 53).
- <sup>17</sup> Jack Goody and Tambiah, Bridewealth and Dowry (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973) 1-58.
- <sup>18</sup> Gotras: “The brahmins of the later Vedic period were divided into exogamous septs (*gotra*), a system which was copied in part by other classes and has survived to the present day” (Basham 1967 140).  
Pravaras: “In the brahmin’s daily worship he mentioned not only the name of the founder of his gotra, but also the names of certain other sages who were believed to be the remote ancestors of his family” (ibid).
- <sup>19</sup> The Times of India is India’s leading English daily newspaper with the highest national circulation. It was established in 1835.
- <sup>20</sup> K. Ganesh, “Patrilineal Structure and Agency of Women.” Saraswathi, ed., (1999) 235-54.
- <sup>21</sup> A. Sen, “Economics and the Family” Uberoi, ed., (1993) 452-66.
- <sup>22</sup> *Putana* is a demoness sent by *Krishna*’s uncle *King Kamsa* to kill the infant *Krishna*; who according to divine legend was born as the destroyer of the evil *Kamsa*.
- <sup>23</sup> Krishna: Dark Indian God worshipped in all parts of India. He is taken to be the author of the Bhagavad Gita (a core text of Hinduism) and is considered to be one of the main *avatars* or reincarnations of Vishnu, the Preserver; one of the main gods of the Vedic Hindu trilogy of Brahma, Vishnu and Maheshwar.
- <sup>24</sup> A. Beteille, “The Family and Reproduction of Inequality” Uberoi, ed., (1993 ) 435-51.
- <sup>25</sup> Niccolo Machiavelli, Il Principe e Altre Opere Politiche ( Milano: Grazanti Editore, 1976).
- <sup>26</sup> Basham refers to Dharma (duty), Artha (wealth) and Kama (pleasure) – Basham. 1967,1989. But P. Thomas in KamaKalpa (1960) adds the fourth, that is *Moksha* or Salvation.
- <sup>27</sup> A Indian musical instrument similar to the *Sitar*.
- <sup>28</sup> Martin Jacques’ Interview with Professor Stuart Hall. 21.5.03

- <sup>29</sup> The concept of 'cultural dominant' is borrowed from Frederic Jameson's work, Postmodernism or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism. (Durham; Duke University Press, 1991).
- <sup>30</sup> E. Balibar, and I. Wallerstein, Race, Nation, Class (London:Verso, 1991).
- <sup>31</sup> A. Rajadhyaksha, "The Judgement: Re-forming the 'Public'" Journal of Arts and Ideas (32-33)131-50.
- <sup>32</sup> Melodrama is a form of dramatic composition in prose partaking of the nature of tragedy, comedy, pantomime, and spectacle, and intended for a popular audience. Primarily concerned with situation and plot, it calls upon mimed action extensively and employs a more or less fixed complement of stock characters, the most important of which are a suffering heroine or hero, a persecuting villain, and a benevolent comic. It is conventionally moral and humanitarian in point of view and sentimental and optimistic in temper, concluding its fable happily with virtue rewarded after many trials and vice punished. Characteristically, it offers elaborate scenic accessories and miscellaneous *divertissements* and introduces music freely, typically to underscore dramatic effect ---Frank Rahill, The World of Melodrama (Pennsylvania, 1967) xiv in J. Smith, Melodrama ( London, 1973) 5.
- <sup>33</sup> The Indian style and accent adopted while speaking English.
- <sup>34</sup> The Indian film actor Amitabh Bachchan was a one-man phenomenon whose success started in 1973 with the film *Zanjeer*. He portrayed the hero almost as anti-hero, but with a heart of gold. He had the largest fan following of any Indian movie actor and even with the onset of age continues to be very popular. His persona has acquired the status of a legend.
- <sup>35</sup> *Teesri Manzil*,(1966), *Phir Wohi Dil Laya Hoon* (1963), *Janwar* (1967), *Love in Tokyo* (1967), *Evening in Paris* (1967), to cite a few examples of such films.
- <sup>36</sup> Dick Hebdige, Subculture: The Meaning of Style (London: Methuen, 1991).
- <sup>37</sup> In Urdu, the word 'Pakeezah' means 'the pure one'.
- <sup>38</sup> Divakaruni, C: 115-19.
- <sup>39</sup> The *Bidhata Purush* or God of Fortune is supposed to visit new-born children to write their fortunes on their foreheads. This cultural belief is especially strong within the Bengali community in India.
- <sup>40</sup> Cinema retelling tales based on epics or Indian religious myths or historical tales.
- <sup>41</sup> Jackie was an immensely popular youth magazine that was started in 1964 and had tremendous impact on youth and sub-culture in Britain.

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- <sup>42</sup> A. McRobbie, Feminism and Youth Culture (Basingstoke: MacMillan, 1991) Chapter 4 (81-93).
- <sup>43</sup> 'Sapney' literally translates as 'Dreams'.
- <sup>44</sup> S. Chakravarty, National Identity in Indian Popular Cinema 1947-1987 (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1993) 125.
- <sup>45</sup> Shoma A. Chatterji, "The Western Outlook on Cinema" Lal and Dasgupta, eds., (1995) 351-6.
- <sup>46</sup> Bachchan usually portrayed taciturn and unromantic male characters, controlling within him hidden rage and an intensity of passion.
- <sup>47</sup> Maithili Rao, "Images of Women" Lal and Dasgupta, eds., (1995) 341-50.
- <sup>48</sup> The sentence may be taken to mean that the girls have besmirched the family name. The construction of the sentence renders it almost a literal translation into English from spoken Bangla.
- <sup>49</sup> A. McRobbie, (1991) Chapter 5 (61-79).
- <sup>50</sup> Regarding the M.G. Ramachandran's image as a film hero, the research scholar and consultant, Vasanthi Sankaranarayan comments: "In his capacity as a subaltern hero he appropriates the signs of power of the superordinate class such as a) the authority to dispense justice and exercise violence b) access to literacy c) access to women. He likewise gains control over other signs of authority such as dress, language, bodily gestures. The dress he wore, the gestures and language that he used, the language he used are not of subordination, but of authority. Thus after identification of himself as a subaltern he made the appropriation of the powers of superordinate classes acceptable to the subalterns in reality.----- V. Sankaranarayan, "The Star Politician of the South" Lal and Dasgupta, eds., (1995) 329.
- <sup>51</sup> Judith Williamson, "Woman is an Island: Femininity and Colonization" Modleski, ed., (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1986) 99-118.
- <sup>52</sup> The term 'participant-observer' is taken from James Clifford's work on cultural anthropology, The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth Century Ethnography, Literature and Art (Cambridge, Massachusetts & London, England: Harvard University Press, 1988) 38.
- <sup>53</sup> Maithili Rao, "Heart of the Movie" Joshi, ed., (2001) 298-331.
- <sup>54</sup> Deepa Gahlot, "Villains and Vamps" in Joshi, ed., (2001) 252-97.
- <sup>55</sup> Madhu Jain, "Bollywood: Next Generation" in Joshi, ed., (2001) 298-343.

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- <sup>56</sup> In his essay, Hall discusses televisual messages, but the theories are appropriate for analysing readership issues.
- <sup>57</sup> [www.geneseo.edu/~bicket/panop/author\\_H.htm](http://www.geneseo.edu/~bicket/panop/author_H.htm). 9 April, 2003.  
[www.jahsonic.com/stuatHall.html](http://www.jahsonic.com/stuatHall.html). 9 April, 2003.
- <sup>58</sup> Hanna Papanek, "To Each Less Than She Needs, From Each More Than She Can Do: Allocation, Entitlements and Value" I. Tinker, ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990) 162-84.
- <sup>59</sup> The ancient Hindu system of arranging marriages whereby a bride garlanded her preferred groom from a selection of gathered suitors.
- <sup>60</sup> Usha Kumar, "Life stages in the Development of the Hindu Woman in India." Adler ed. (1991) 143-59.
- <sup>61</sup> Gayatri Chakraborty Spivak, "Postmarked Calcutta." Harasym ed. (London, New York: Routledge, 1990) 75-94.
- <sup>62</sup> Veena Das, "The Body as Metaphor: Socialization of Women in Punjabi Urban Families", *Manushi* 28 (1985) 2-6.
- <sup>63</sup> Tagore (1861-1941) was the scion of a wealthy Bengali Brahmo family. Poet, litterateur, first Indian Nobel prize winner (1913), he was and is a Bengali icon.
- <sup>64</sup> Sunil Gangopadhyay, *First Light*, trans. Aruna Chakravarti. (India: Penguin Books, 2001).
- <sup>65</sup> *Atlantic Unbound* /Interviews. "A Woman's Place: An Interview with Chitra Banerji Divakaruni" 9 April 1998. 29 October 2003 <<http://www.theatlantic.com/unbound/factfict/ff9804.htm>>.
- <sup>66</sup> Joanna Russ, "What Can a Heroine Do or Why Women Cannot Write?"—This reference is taken from *Images of Woman in Fiction: Feminist Perspectives* by Susan Koppelman Cornillon (Bowling Green University, Popular Press, Bowling Green, Ohio—3403, Revised edition, First Print—1973) 4.
- <sup>67</sup> Shashi Deshpande, "The Dilemma of a Woman Writer" *The Fiction of Shashi Deshpande*, Pathak ed., (New Delhi: Creative Books, 1998) 30 October 2003. <<http://www.ch.8m.com/womanw.htm>, [30.10.03](http://www.ch.8m.com/womanw.htm)>
- <sup>68</sup> Divakaruni, "What Women Share" *Essay: Bold Type*, 27 May, 1999.  
< <http://www.boldtype.com/0199/divakaruni/essay.html>, >[27.05.99](http://www.boldtype.com/0199/divakaruni/essay.html)

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- <sup>69</sup>James A. Doyle, The Male Experience (Iowa: W.C. Brown Company Publishers, 1983).
- <sup>70</sup> Romita Choudhuri, "Interview with Shashi Deshpande." in World Literature Written in English Vol. 34.2 (1995): 15-26.
- <sup>71</sup> Prof. Altekar in discussing the Vedic age writes : "Grown up and educated girls naturally played an important part in the management of their parents' households"(1938) 17.
- <sup>72</sup> *Ramayan*—Hindu epic poem of the Aryan era telling the story of Rama and Sita as ideal beings and the vanquishing of the evil demon king Ravana by Rama.
- <sup>73</sup> Sindoor or vermilion: the red powder applied in the parting of a Hindu woman's hair denoting married status.
- <sup>74</sup> Basham is quoting from the Kamasutra by Vatsayayana—trans. S.C. Upadhyaya, Bombay (1961).
- <sup>75</sup> A reader conversant with political happenings in India would be well aware after reading the novel that Saroja's marriage took place in the mid-1960s and even at that period her husband is not described as a young man.
- <sup>76</sup> Chitrita Banerji's description of Durga Puja (festival) in Bengal:  
Its primary icon is that of the many-armed goddess Durga, a resplendent figure, all gold and red, riding a lion and carrying ten different weapons in her ten hands, a potent symbol of victory and hope destroys the dark demon Mahishasura. (2001) 3
- <sup>77</sup> M. K. Naik, "Piebald Trisanku: The Eurasian in Anglo-Indian Literature", Nabar and Bharucha, eds., (1994) 53-67.
- <sup>78</sup> Arthur J. Pais, "Interview: Chitra Divakaruni." 28 October 1999. <<http://www.rediff.co.in/cgi-bin/n...ent.d2w/report?fname=3103.chit.htm>>.
- <sup>79</sup> Chow writes: " "Genitalism" per Gayatri Spivak, is the attitude that "depending on what kind of genitals you have, you can or cannot speak in certain situations." (Chow refers to: Spivak, G. "Questions of Multi-Culturalism" The Post-Colonial Critic, Harasym, ed., 1990) 62 (1993) 198.
- <sup>80</sup> <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/cms.dll/html/uncomp/articleshow,27.10.03>.
- <sup>81</sup> Juliet Blair, "Private Parts in Public Places: The Case of Actresses", Ardener, ed., (London: Croom Helm



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in association with the Oxford University Women's Studies Committee, 1981) 205-28.

<sup>82</sup> Region around present day Patna in the eastern Indian state of Bihar, once the seat of great empires of the Maurya and Gupta dynasties.

<sup>83</sup> Refers to Seleucus Nicator, ex-general in Alexander the Great's army, who assumed control of certain conquered territories after the death of Alexander in 323 B.C and declared himself as king.

<sup>84</sup> John Wilson, Indian Caste 2 vols. (Bombay: 1877) in G. S. Ghurye, Caste and Race in India (London: Kegan, Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co. Ltd., 1932) 1-2.

<sup>85</sup> These titles were conferred on the upper-caste Hindu and Muslim families at different points in Indian history. They were used as a family name by themselves or were often attached to the family name, eg: Sen-Sharma, Basu-Ray, Datta-Chaudhari. The first halves were the surname and the latter, the actual titles.

<sup>86</sup> Leela Dube, "Caste and Women." Caste: Its Twentieth Century Avatar M.N. Srinivas, ed., (India: Viking by Penguin Books, 1997).

<sup>87</sup> Jhinga: A member of the marrow family. Green in colour and watery.

<sup>88</sup> Abbe J. Dubois, Hindu Manners, Customs and Ceremonies ed. and trans. H. K. Beauchamp (1906, Calcutta: Rupa, 1992) 341-42 in S. Kakar, The Indian Psyche (1996).

<sup>89</sup> See Chapter One.

<sup>90</sup> Altekar is quoting from G.S. Apastamba, ed. By Winternitz, (Vienna, 1887).

<sup>91</sup> Marwaris—an Indian Hindu community hailing from Rajasthan in north-western India who are traditionally known as expert traders and businessmen. During the British Raj they settled for trading purposes in West Bengal and today are flourishing entrepreneurs in Kolkata owning successful businesses. This is not to say that they are not found following other professions such as medicine, chartered accountancy etc. They are known to be able finance people.

<sup>92</sup> Mofussil: Areas and towns outside the main city areas. This term was used by the British in their rule of Bengal to denote areas outside the main city of Calcutta, e.g Howrah, Chinsurah and so on.

<sup>93</sup> Kulinism—a Kulin was a high caste Brahmin allowed to practice polygamy. He conferred his high caste status on innumerable woman of diverse ages by marrying them and obtaining dowry from fathers who believed that a getting a Kulin Brahmin as a son-in-law led to salvation and immortality.

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Dagmar Engels in her study of Bengali women writes:

Kulin Brahmins were notorious for their dowry demands. Due to their high rank they were much sought after as bridegrooms and could demand virtually any amount of money from their parents-in-law. In the 1880s, Ramchandra Mukherji, a Kulin Brahman from Hooghly, for instance, received a dowry of Rs. 250 from the father of his thirty-third wife. --- Dagmar Engels, Beyond Purdah: Women in Bengal 1890-1939 (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1996) 49.

<sup>94</sup> ‘Sumangali’ denotes a married Hindu woman who does not die a widow, literally translates as ‘woman with good luck’ or ‘she who brings good luck’.

<sup>95</sup> Boggs quotes from Gramsci “The Modern Prince” in Selected Prison Notes (192-93).

<sup>96</sup> See Chapter Three.

<sup>97</sup> Was considered to pollute the person and result in loss of caste.

<sup>98</sup> Family astrologers, who are usually Brahmin priests match the horoscopes to determine the extent of compatibility between the girl and boy prior to fixing the marriage. Nowadays, some families have discarded the practice altogether.

<sup>99</sup> See Chapter One

<sup>100</sup> ‘Jati’ can be taken to mean caste or generally ‘group’, ‘sort’ or ‘kind’.

<sup>101</sup> Gotra is sub-caste. The name of a Rishi signifies one’s gotra, the family bearing that name is supposed to have descended from that Rishi or sage. For instance take the surname Sanyal, used by Divakaruni. The Bengali surname Sanyal signifies that they are Barendra Brahmins of the ‘Vatsav’ gotra. They have descended from that sage. The gotra will be common to all Sanyals.

<sup>102</sup> Boggs quotes from “The Modern Prince” in Selected Prison Notes (199).

<sup>103</sup> Maitrayee Chaudhari, “Among My Own in Another Culture: Meeting the Asian Indian Americans” M. Thapan, ed., (1994) 188-216.

<sup>104</sup> Altekari is citing an instance recorded in the *Brhad-aranyaka Upanishad*, III, 6 and 8.

<sup>105</sup> In earlier times, within certain Southern Indian Hindu communities, marriages were arranged between maternal uncle and niece as it was a caste endogamous, but gotra exogamous marriage.

<sup>106</sup> Ien Ang explores this idea with regard to Pauline Hanson’s racial electoral policies in Australia and this idea is further explored in Chapter 6.

<sup>107</sup> Pedas: Indian sweetmeats, made of dried milk and sugar in small shapes

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- <sup>108</sup> The ancient Hindu scriptures divide a person's life in four stages, namely, *Brahmacharya* or the student's life, *Grihastha* or the life of the householder, *Vanaprastha* or moving to the forests to lessen worldly attachments and *Sanyas* or the stage of total renunciation.
- <sup>109</sup> *Gayatri mantra* is the invocation to the sun chanted by a Brahmin male upon his initiation into Brahminhood, through his Upanayanam or thread ceremony.
- <sup>110</sup> Boggs quoting from "Problems of Marxism" Selected Prison Notes (388).
- <sup>111</sup> Altekar's reference is to the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*, VI, 4, 27.
- <sup>112</sup> Puranas: The *Puranas* contain collection of myths, philosophical dialogues, ritual prescriptions, but also genealogies of North and Central Indian dynasties up to the early guptas. They are therefore also important as historical sources. For the various sects of Hinduism they provide a storehouse of myths about different gods as well as legends concerning the holy places of the Hindus. There are altogether 18 Great puranas and 18 Lesser Puranas which were frequently amended up to late medieval times. --- Kulke and Rothermund, A History of India (1991) 92.
- <sup>113</sup> K. Chakrabarti, "Divine Family and World Maintainance: Ganesa in the Bengal Puranas" Kumkum Sangari and Uma Chakravarti, eds., (Shimla: Institute of Advanced Study, New Delhi: Manohar Publishers and Distributors, 1999) 56-84.
- <sup>114</sup> Lower academic standard of Central Schools.
- <sup>115</sup> Jyoti Puri, "Reading Romance Novels", Gender and Society (August 1997) 434-52.
- <sup>116</sup> P.M. Sarangapani, "The Child's Construction of Knowledge" Saraswathi ed., (1999) 85-122.
- <sup>117</sup> T.S.Saraswathi, "Adult-Child Continuity in India: Is Adolescence a Myth or an Emerging Reality?." Saraswathi, ed., (1999) 213-282.
- <sup>118</sup> Chitra Divakaruni, Arranged Marriage (New York: Random House, 1995).
- <sup>119</sup> Ritu Menon, "No Longer Silent " Afterword., A Matter of Time by Shashi Deshpande (1996). 28 October 2003. <<http://ch.8m.com/ritu1.htm>.
- <sup>120</sup> Divakaruni. "What Women Share," 27 May 1999. <<http://www.boldtype.com/0199/divakaruni/essay.html>>.
- <sup>121</sup> H. Papanek, "To Each Less Than She Needs, From Each More Than She Can Do" in I. Tinker, ed., (1990) 162-84.

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- <sup>122</sup> S. Banerjee, "Marginalization of Women's Culture in Nineteenth Century Bengal" Sangari and Vaid, eds., ( 1989 1990) 127-79.
- <sup>123</sup> See Chapters One and Three.
- <sup>124</sup> S. Kapadia, "Self, Women and Empowerment: A Conceptual Enquiry" Saraswathi, ed., (1999) 255-77.
- <sup>125</sup> A. Gramsci, Selections from Prison Notebooks (418) as quoted in R. Boccock, Hegemony (1986).
- <sup>126</sup> Saraswathi, T.S., "Adult-Child Continuity in India: Is Adolescence a Myth or an Emerging Reality?". Saraswathi, ed., (1999) 213-32.
- <sup>127</sup> *Bhooth* in Hindi and some other Indian languages such as Bangla means *ghost*.
- <sup>128</sup> T.S. Saraswathi. (1999), quotes Ramanujam B.K. "Toward Maturity: Problems of Identity seen in the Indian Clinical Setting" in S.Kakar, ed., Identity and Adulthood (37-55) (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1979) 54.
- <sup>129</sup> N. Chaudhary, "Language Socialization: Patterns of Caregiver Speech to Young Children" Saraswathi, ed., (1999) 145-66.
- <sup>130</sup> See Chapter One.
- <sup>131</sup> The term 'zari' refers to the traditional intricate gold work on saris.
- <sup>132</sup> Indiradevi towards the end of the quote refers to Blood, R. O. and Wolfe, D. M. Husbands and Wives---The Dynamics of Married Living, A Free Paperback, (1965)34.
- <sup>133</sup> The reference here is to the Indo-English writer Rukun Advani.
- <sup>134</sup> T. Vijay Kumar, "Post-colonialism or Postcolonialism? Relocating the Hyphen" Trivedi and Mukherjee, eds. , (1996) 195-202.
- <sup>135</sup> See Chapters One and Three.
- <sup>136</sup> Areca nuts—a condiment traditionally eaten with betel leaves or *paan*
- <sup>137</sup> Lakshmi Mani, "Shattering Stereotypes: The Silences, Secrets and Strengths of Women," Tuesday, 25 March, 2003, in indiacurrents.com. <[http:// www.indiacurrents.com/199808/bookReview.ht](http://www.indiacurrents.com/199808/bookReview.ht) >.
- <sup>138</sup> Ien Ang, "Intertwining Histories: Heritage and Diversity," NSW History Council

<sup>139</sup> See Conclusion.

<sup>140</sup> *Sahib* – The Hindi term for white man. In the context of this novel, it specifically refers to British or Westernized ways adopted by certain upper and middle class educated Indians.

<sup>141</sup> Udipi: A small town in Karnataka, South India.

<sup>142</sup> *Angrez*: The Hindi word for ‘English’

<sup>143</sup> Manisha Roy, *Bengali Women* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972).

<sup>144</sup> *Bibiji*: Hindi for wife or consort.

<sup>145</sup> The ideal third stage in a Hindu life; when the householder sheds all material and family responsibility and goes forth into the world as a travelling mendicant in search of divine knowledge.

<sup>146</sup> *Sanyasi*: Hindi word for sage.

<sup>147</sup> Robbie Clipper Sethi, *Indiastar Book Review*, Anita Rau Badami’s *Tamarind Mem*. 25 March 2003. <<http://www.indiastar.com/badami.htm>>.

<sup>148</sup> Roy links this indifference to the status accorded to the ascetic image of Lord Shiva who is worshipped as the most eligible of husbands by young girls. Young women in India especially Bengal, keep a fast call *Shiv-brata* in order to be granted the boon of a good husband.

<sup>149</sup> Sonali Vepa, “Women Bond, Men Observe”. [www.sven.com/archives/cupertinocourier/cu-news5.html](http://www.sven.com/archives/cupertinocourier/cu-news5.html). 15 July, 2002.

<sup>150</sup> K. Ganesh, “Mother Who is Not a Mother : In Search of the Great Indian Goddess”, *Economic and Political Weekly* (20-6 October 1990, WS) 58-64.

<sup>151</sup> Kali is so called not just because of her colour, but she is considered the one who is the conqueror of time or *Kaal* itself, therefore, Kali --- the victor of all ages This cultural knowledge stems from my upbringing as a Hindu Bengal Brahmin girl, whose family goddess and deity is Kali and therefore all children in the family were made aware of all legends and classical myths and references associated with Kali puja, that is worship of the family goddess.

<sup>152</sup> The scriptures for such worship were the *tantras* and their base scripture was the *Atharva veda* which was mostly taboo amongst Brahministic or *Mantrik Hinduism*. Human sacrifice was a feature to

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*Tantrik* cults as it was supposed to be based on the worship of the powerful mother goddess and was needed to appease her supposed blood-lust.

- <sup>153</sup> Tanika Sarkar, 'Nationalist Iconography,' Economic and Political Weekly (21 November 1987) 2011-15.
- <sup>154</sup> This happens when he feels betrayed upon realising that his much loved sister Sudha and he are half-siblings. His parents had not revealed that prior to their death. His father had married his widowed, sister-in-law. A somewhat questionable act in conservative India of an earlier era (Deshpand 51-53)
- <sup>155</sup> Reference taken from K. Roy, "Where Women are Worshipped, There the Gods Rejoice," Sarkar and Butalia, eds., Women and the Hindu Right: A Collection of Essays, (Delhi: Kali for Women, 1995) 10-28.
- <sup>156</sup> R. Sunder Rajan, Real and Imagined Women: Gender, Culture and Postcolonialism (New York and London : Routledge, 1993).
- <sup>157</sup> Sangari and Vaid in Gedalof (1999).
- <sup>158</sup> See Chapter Two.
- <sup>159</sup> S. Hall, 'What is this 'black' in black popular culture?' Morley and Chen, eds., Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies (New York, London: Routledge, 1996).
- <sup>160</sup> Indian *litterateur* (1897-2001). Self-professed anglophile. At age 57, first went to England and settled there. Taught at Oxford. Wrote Autobiography of an Unknown Indian and other books. Last book, Three Horsemen and the Apocalypse was written at age 99.
- <sup>161</sup> Upanishads: Main philosophical texts encompassing core theories of Hinduism.
- <sup>162</sup> Comic books, usually in English, retelling tales of Indian history, religion and mythology.
- <sup>163</sup> Uma Chakravarti, "Whatever Happened to the Vedic *Dasi*?: Orientalism, Nationalism and a Script for the Past" Sangari and Vaid, eds., (1989 1990) 27-87.
- <sup>164</sup> Ang, "Migrations of Chineseness: Ethnicity in the Postmodern World" 5 March 2004. <<http://www.arts.uwa.edu.MotsPluriels/MP798ia.html>>.
- <sup>165</sup> "Foreign Dialogues- Part 3: Out of Bounds" Ien Ang with Mary Zournazi, 5 March 2004. <<http://www.abc.net.au/rn/arts/radioeye/transcripts/stories/S53213.htm>>.

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